

Hitler Democrat

By General Léon Degrelle

THE BARNES REVIEW



HITLER DEMOCRAT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Léon Degrelle – Warrior for the West	6
CHAPTER 1: The Enigma of Hitler	19
CHAPTER 2: Hitler – The Unknown Soldier	29
CHAPTER 3: Lessons from the Front	38
CHAPTER 4: The Debacle	47
CHAPTER 5: A Treaty of Usurers	52
CHAPTER 6: Seven and a Half Marks	57
CHAPTER 7: Ein Führer	63
CHAPTER 8: Hitler’s Three Chances	72
CHAPTER 9: The Liquidation of the Parties	79
CHAPTER 10: Who Would End the Bankruptcy?	85
CHAPTER 11: Unification of the State	94
CHAPTER 12: Unification of the Labor Unions	109
CHAPTER 13: Where to Find the Billions	117
CHAPTER 14: Hitler’s Social Revolution	129
CHAPTER 15: Conquest by Captivation	143
CHAPTER 16: The Poles of the Ruhr	153
CHAPTER 17: Hitler’s Emphatic „No”	159
CHAPTER 18: Military Unification	167
CHAPTER 19: Territorial Unification	173
CHAPTER 20: Plebiscite in the Saarland	181
CHAPTER 21: The Saarland Votes to Join Germany	189
CHAPTER 22: The Anglo-German Naval Treaty	199
CHAPTER 23: A Great Missed Opportunity	207

CHAPTER 24: England Moves Toward War	215
CHAPTER 25: France Plays with Fire	224
CHAPTER 26: A Tale of Two Pacts	232
CHAPTER 27: Authority and Power	242
CHAPTER 28: Events Leading Up to the Beer Hall Putsch	256
CHAPTER 29: Hitler's Putsch of Nov. 9, 1923	261
CHAPTER 30: The End of Hitler's Would-Be Revolution	273
CHAPTER 31: Hitler Goes on Trial for Treason	282
CHAPTER 32: The Trap setters of Geneva	296
CHAPTER 33: An American at the 1932 Geneva Conference	303
CHAPTER 34: Burial at the League of Nations	310
CHAPTER 35: Adolf Hitler's Strategy	318
CHAPTER 36: The Armies of the People	325
CHAPTER 37: The Case of Paris 1934	332
CHAPTER 38: The Civil War in the National Socialist Party	344
CHAPTER 39: Röhm Continues to Push	351
CHAPTER 40: The Röhm Crisis Worsens	356
CHAPTER 41: The Last Millimeters of the Fuse	363
CHAPTER 42: The Night of the Long Knives	370
CHAPTER 43: A Landslide Victory for Hitler	384
CHAPTER 44: The Challenge to French Marxism	392
CHAPTER 45: Return to the Rhineland	401
CHAPTER 46: The London-Paris Disagreement	409
CHAPTER 47: Il Duce Drops in on the Führer	416
CHAPTER 48: Léon Blum – Collector of Fascisms	428
CHAPTER 49: Hitler and Tukhachevsky	438
CHAPTER 50: Revolutionizing Warfare	453
CHAPTER 51: Hitler and the Olympics	464

CHAPTER 52: The World Visits Hitler	469
CHAPTER 53: Nuremberg in the National Socialist Mind	477
Degrelle Photo Section	486



Adolf Hitler salutes the workers at the Zeppelin field as he prepares to speak at Nuremberg on Reichs Party Day, September 1935. This rally for freedom celebrated the renewal of the German military and the liberation of Germany from the Versailles Treaty.

INTRODUCTION

LÉON DEGRELLE: WARRIOR FOR THE WEST

BY MICHAEL COLLINS PIPER

Here is the inspiring yet tragic story of an idealistic, indomitable and fearless leader who survived the worst that World War II had to offer, only to be struck down by treason in the twilight of his life.

Léon Degrelle died in Malaga, Spain on April 1, 1994 at the age of 87. Before World War II, Degrelle had been Europe's youngest political leader and the founder of the Rexist Party of Belgium. During the war he was a hero on the Eastern Front, fighting to save Europe from Communism. As statesman and soldier, he was acquainted with Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, Franco, Laval, Petain and many other European leaders during the titanic ideological and military clash that was World War II. Alone among them, he survived across nearly five decades to remain a personal witness of that historical period.

Degrelle was born to a family of French origin in the small Ardennes town of Bouillon in Luxembourg on June 15, 1906. He was the son of a prosperous brewer who had immigrated to Luxembourg from France five years earlier, provoked by a French „anti-clerical“ government's expulsion of the Jesuit order. It was said so many of the Degrelles had become Jesuit priests that the Degrelles were „Jesuits from father to son.“

Young Léon studied at the University of Louvain, where he acquired a doctorate in law, but he also immersed himself in other academic disciplines such as political science, art, archeology and philosophy. As a student, his natural gift of leadership became apparent. By the time he reached 20 the young prodigy had already published five books and operated his own weekly newspaper.

Out of his deep Christian conviction, Degrelle joined Belgium's Catholic Action Movement and, naturally, soon became one of its leaders. Léon's passion was people. He wanted to win the crowds, particularly the Marxist ones. He wanted them to share his ideals of social and spiritual change for society. He wanted to lift people up; to forge for them a stable, efficient and responsible state, a state backed by the good sense of people and for the sole benefit of the people. No wonder Degrelle often said: „Either you have the people with you, or you have nothing with you.“ Degrelle, in short, was a populist

Although he was not yet 25, people listened to him avidly. It has been estimated that he addressed more than 2,000 public meetings. His books and newspaper were read everywhere because they always dealt with the real issues. And in a few short years he had won over a large part of the population. Belgium's corrupt political establishment took serious note of this upstart. Although Degrelle had initially been working with Belgium's Catholic Party (one of the nation's three ruling parties, the others being the Liberals and the Socialists) he ultimately began to become disillusioned with the party's ruling clique and began focusing his efforts on building his Rexist movement.

Demanding radical political reform and the establishment of an authoritative „corporative“ state of social justice and national unity, Degrelle launched a hard-driving and brilliant propaganda campaign against the ruling parties, which he came to describe as the *pourris* – that is, „the corrupt“ – and the Rexist movement made great political capital out of the cynical financial manipulations of the parties and their henchmen. Degrelle called them „the banksters.“

Degrelle's movement recognized that the ruling parties, so cooperative when it came to dividing the spoils that accrue to politicians, fostered division and strife throughout Belgium. Historian Allan Cassels points out that, „gradually, Degrelle became more and more anti-capitalist – a shift that was not so much a response to the Great Depression as it was a growing awareness of the ties between business and government revealed in several Belgian scandals.”¹

The platform of the Rexist party reflected the populist tilt „First and foremost, it opposed the dictatorship of super capitalism in Belgium and the Congo and then went on to dismiss Belgian parties and the parliamentary system itself as mere extensions of the rotten business world.... Banks were to be controlled in an unspecified way and unemployment solved by some sort of national planning. Workers were to be protected by a corporative system ‘based on the solidarity of the classes,’ and the organizational structure for Rexist confederations was formulated on paper for trade, industry, agriculture, the artisans, the professions and even the party's administration of the Belgian Congo. Yet, much of the old order would remain; there was room for the monarchy, and even Parliament in truncated form would share legislative authority with the corporations.”²

On May 24, 1936 Degrelle's Rexist candidates won a smashing electoral victory against the established parties by capturing a total of 34 House and Senate seats.

However, the ruling parties of Belgium soon rose to meet the Rexist's' threat to

¹ Alan Cassels. *Fascism*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Co, 1975, p. 247.

² *Ibid.*, p. 247.

their power by uniting in a solid phalanx against the young populist leader. Even the Catholic hierarchy condemned the church's most ardent son in the interests of „moderation.“ As a consequence, the Rex movement's fortunes began to decline. Although his party began to disintegrate under the establishment's applied pressure, Degrelle himself was re-elected to the Parliament with the largest majority of any deputy.

The Europe of Degrelle was still split into little countries, each jealous of its past glories and closed to any contact with neighboring peoples. In the late 1930s, as war loomed, Degrelle devoted his attention to assuring Belgium's neutrality in order to prevent his nation from again being used as a buffer between Germany and France in the event of hostilities. But, even as he labored for the short-term integrity of Belgium's borders, the far-sighted Degrelle was also looking toward the future of the continent. In his student days he had traveled across Latin America, the United States and Canada. He had visited North Africa, the Middle East and, of course, all of the European countries. He felt that Europe had a unique destiny to fulfill and must unite behind its common cultural heritage.

Mussolini invited Degrelle to Rome. Churchill saw him in London, and Hitler received him in Berlin. Putting his political life on the line, he made desperate efforts to stop the railroading of Europe into another war. But old rivalries, petty hatreds and suspicion between the French and the Germans were cleverly exploited. The established parties and the Communist Party worked on the same side: for war. For the Kremlin it was a unique opportunity to communize Europe – after it had first been weakened and bled.

On Sept. 3, 1939 – due to pressure from organized Jewry throughout the world, in addition to the efforts of U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt (who maintained intimate ties to the powerful Jewish elite in the United States) – England declared war on Germany, although Hitler had done everything possible to stop war from occurring.

When Belgium was dragged into the war in 1940, Degrelle's political enemies saw an opportunity to strike down the Rexist leader. He was arrested by government loyalists on May 10, 1940, accused of being a „fifth columnist,“ and was imprisoned, beaten and tortured. Given up for dead by his family, Degrelle ended up at a concentration camp in southern France. However, when German officials favorably inclined toward Degrelle learned of his whereabouts, he was released and returned to Belgium, where, in fact, he initially avoided collaborating with the German occupation forces, unlike, ironically, many of his opportunistic foes in the prewar „democratic“ Belgian political establishment.

But the European civil war continued. And the rulers of Communism got ready

to move in and pick up the fractured pieces. Learning of Josef Stalin's plan to invade the heart of Western Europe through Soviet occupied Poland and then Germany, Hitler beat him to the punch by launching a preemptive invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941.

The most important political and military phenomenon of World War II is also the least known: the Waffen-SS (literally „weapons Schutzstaffel,” or „armed defense unit”). And Léon Degrelle was one of the most famous Waffen-SS soldiers. The Waffen-SS were the ideological and military shock troops of a planned New Order for Europe. After the Germans began their assault against the bastion of international Communism, from every country in Europe thousands of young men came forth, their minds resolved that the destiny of their native countries was now at stake.

These men volunteered their lives in the fight against the Soviets believing that, after first destroying the Bolshevik threat, they would work together to create a united Europe. Volunteers swelled the ranks of the Waffen-SS, which grew to include more than 400,000 non-German Europeans fighting on the Eastern Front. Scores of new divisions were added to the Waffen-SS order of battle. The German troops numbered 600,000.

Despite the past efforts of Napoleon, the one-million-strong Waffen-SS represented the first truly pan-European army to ever exist. As envisioned, after the war each unit of this army was to provide its people with a political structure free of the petty nationalism of the past. All the SS fought the same struggle. All shared the same world view. All were comrades in arms and suffered the same wounds.

When Hitler struck against the Soviet Union, Degrelle offered to raise a volunteer battalion of his Walloons to ensure a place of honor for French-speaking Belgians in Hitler's new Europe. After joining as a private he earned all stripes from corporal to general for exceptional bravery in combat. He engaged in 75 hand-to-hand combat actions. He was wounded seven times. He was the recipient of the highest honors and was, quite notably, one of the first non-Germans to be awarded the coveted Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross, personally bestowed upon Degrelle by Hitler during a ceremony held in Berlin on Aug. 27, 1944.

It should be noted that when, in 1941, Degrelle first departed for the Eastern Front he was 35 years old and had never even fired a gun. And although he had been offered high rank – in tribute to his stellar prewar accomplishments with the Rexist party – Degrelle, in the same manner as Peter the Great, chose to start out as a private, sharing the burdens of his comrades, rising by his abilities alone through the ranks to the position of commander of the unit he raised: the SS Brigade „Wallonia.”

It is thus no wonder that his fellow volunteers jokingly called their comrade-turned-leader, „Modest the First, Duke of Burgundy.” But, of the first 800 Walloon

volunteers who left for the Eastern Front, only three survived the war – one of them Degrelle. Some 2,500 of his fellow Walloons died, wearing the uniform of the Waffen-SS, while fighting the Soviets during that period.

Of the SS Degrelle has said, „If the Waffen-SS had not existed, Europe would have been overrun entirely by the Soviets by 1944. They would have reached Paris long before the Americans. Waffen-SS heroism stopped the Soviet juggernaut at Moscow, Cherkov, Cherkassy and Ternopol. The Soviets lost more than 12 months. Without SS resistance the Soviets would have been in Normandy before Eisenhower. The people showed deep gratitude to the young men who sacrificed their lives. Not since the great religious orders of the Middle Ages had there been such selfless idealism and heroism. In this century of materialism, the men of the SS stand out as a shining light of spirituality. I have no doubt whatever that the sacrifices and incredible feats of the Waffen-SS will have their own epic poets like Schiller. Greatness in adversity is the distinction of the SS.”

After four nearly continuous years in the inferno of battle, his legion was one of the last to retreat from Russia. This titanic struggle against the combined forces of Communism and the „Allied democracies” is described in his famous epic, *Campaign in Russia*, which earned him renown in Europe as „the Homer of the 20th century.”

And when Degrelle returned to Brussels after fighting Communism for four years on the Eastern Front, he was given the largest mass welcome in Belgian history. Tens of thousands of Belgians lined the streets of Brussels to cheer the returning general only two months before the Allies invaded their country.

However, Degrelle knew that he, as one of the fiercest foes of Communism who had survived the war, was targeted for extermination. He would not bow to the conquerors.

As Germany collapsed, Degrelle made his way to Norway (still under German control at that time), where he boarded a transport airplane and flew over Allied-occupied portions of Europe. He and the crew endured constant anti-aircraft fire all along the way, and crash landed on the Spanish border when the plane ran out of fuel. Degrelle suffered multiple injuries in the forced landing including several broken bones. He spent a year in the hospital recuperating, most of it in a plaster cast, unable to move. Typically, as soon as his right arm became free, the SS general began writing his masterwork, *Campaign in Russia*, which appeared in two French editions.

Soon after the cessation of hostilities, the Allies threatened to invade Spain unless Degrelle and wartime French Prime Minister Pierre Laval were immediately turned over for execution. Franco compromised. He turned over Laval but kept

Degrelle on the grounds that he could not be physically removed from the hospital.

A year later Degrelle was given refuge in a monastery. However, back home members of his family and many friends and supporters were arrested and tortured to death by the „democratic liberators“ of Belgium. His children (seven girls and a little boy) were forcibly shipped to detention centers in different parts of Europe, after their names were changed in order to frustrate any effort to reunite the family or ascertain their fate. The Belgian authorities ordered that they were never to be permitted contact with one another or with their father.

The new Belgian government condemned Degrelle to death *in absentia* on three separate occasions. A special law was passed, the *Lex Degrellana*, which made it illegal to transfer, possess, or receive any book by or about Degrelle. *Campaign in Russia* was thus banned in Belgium.

Completely alone, Degrelle went on to rebuild his shattered life. With the energy and burning spirit that had never left him, he worked as a manual laborer in construction. And just as he had risen from private to general on the battlefield, Degrelle rose to build a major construction company with important contracts. The quality and efficiency of his company became so well known that the U.S. government commissioned him to build major defense projects, including military airfields, in Spain. Meanwhile, Degrelle's loyal emissaries searched Europe for his kidnapped children. All were found and returned to their father's loving care.

On 12 separate occasions over some 40 years Degrelle challenged the Belgian government to put him on public trial with a jury. His repeated demands to be tried in a legitimate court of law (as opposed to an inquisitorial Nuremberg-style show trial) were met with embarrassed and guilty silence. However, there were high-level attempts to „liquidate“ Degrelle during his exile in Spain. On July 5, 1961 the Spanish police arrested two individuals attempting to cross into Spain from a small village in the Pyrenees Mountains on the French border. Traveling in a Lincoln Continental were an Israeli citizen using the name Zuis Alduide Idelon and another person with a French passport under the name Suison Jake De Mon.

In their possession were weapons, ammunition, foreign currency valued at approximately \$500,000 (U.S.), an anesthetic kit, the detailed plans of a Spanish villa and, lastly, a box shaped like a coffin. The two eventually confessed that they were in a commando team working for Israeli intelligence, charged with kidnapping Gen. Degrelle. Their plan was as follows:

Part of the team (composed in total of 10 men) was to arrive in a helicopter at Degrelle's estate, grab and sedate him and bring him to Tarragona. There, the unconscious Degrelle would have been put in the box and taken aboard a small boat

at night and taken to a French Mediterranean port where he would have been shipped on a large vessel bound for Israel. Upon arrival Degrelle would have been put on display and then delivered to the Belgian government or simply murdered.

Subsequently the Spanish police succeeded in arresting the leader of the commando team, a Spanish Communist, Rubio de la Goaquina, as well as six of his men. The police learned that the kidnapping plot had been arranged, in part, through the assistance of Soviet agents.

In 1983 the Spanish socialists, in league with international Jewish pressure groups, began a loud clamor to have Degrelle deported from Spain, but the effort failed. This, however, did not stop those same Jewish pressure groups from launching yet a second offensive against Degrelle. Leading the pack was Rabbi Marvin Hier (called by his critics Rabbi „Liar“) and his colleague, Rabbi Abraham Cooper, both leaders of a very profitable fund-raising venture known as the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies, a Los Angeles-based operation named after the controversial self-described „Nazi hunter.“

Since it had been finally admitted that the most infamous „Nazi fugitive,“ Dr. Josef Mengele, was actually dead and gone and not „hiding in Argentina“ (or Bolivia or Paraguay or Panama or some such place), Hier and Cooper evidently decided that Gen. Degrelle was an ideal new „Nazi beast“ to have as their fund-raising „poster boy.“

The two put up a \$100,000 bounty for the „capture“ of Degrelle, but that in itself was a faïre, since Degrelle lived freely and openly in Spain, where he was a popular figure in cafe society, often dining with a host of friends, including many international admirers who came to call on the retired military leader and European statesman.

The Hier-Cooper gang hysterically and vocally demanded that Degrelle be tried for „war crimes“ and, of course, urged donors to help finance their public relations campaign against the general. Interestingly, several years previously, Jean Charlier, a prominent French television producer who was preparing a documentary on Degrelle, approached both the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and Simon Wiesenthal asking for information he could include in his planned project as to the nature and brutality of the „war crimes“ Degrelle might have committed. They informed Charlier that there was no evidence against Degrelle and that the Belgian general was not wanted for war crimes by any international tribunal as such. However, now that it was in the (financial) interest of the Simon Wiesenthal Center to have a new „war criminal at large,“ the story changed.

At the time, Degrelle commented on the affair in an exclusive interview

published in *The Spotlight* on Oct. 28, 1985. Degrelle told *The Spotlight*: „Dr. Abraham Cooper knows very well that he does not possess the least argument against me. He confesses himself that he can only base himself on suppositions.” Degrelle pointed out that Cooper had said, for example: „It would not surprise me but that he [Degrelle] has committed blood crimes.”

„Can you imagine that?” asked Degrelle. „As if during 40 years they have made countless investigations against me, all of which have proven fruitless for the simple reason that there was nothing against me. Cooper does not stand on ceremony when he admits that what he wants to make me pay for are not any reprehensible acts, but ideas, my ideas. To avenge himself on the ideas of a person who thinks differently than himself, the Jewish dignitary mounts a manhunt abroad with a \$100,000 prize for whoever brings in the beast alive.

‘„Léon Degrelle,’ Dr. Abraham Cooper has declared [of me], ‘is guilty of promoting Nazi ideas among the young people of the whole world. We shall follow him closely, and we will see to it that he pays for his misdeeds.’

„You have read right: ‘ideas,’ ” added Degrelle. „One cannot any longer have ideas other than those approved by Rabbi Abraham. Such intolerance is unheard of, especially coming from a country such as the United States, where the freedom of thought is proclaimed to be sacred. This manhunt, organized by private people, has something monstrous about it

„These hunters have at their disposal very considerable funds. Those funds, this modern river of gold, until this summer were earmarked to kidnap Josef Mengele. But now it has been established that Mengele has been dead for more than five years, while Wiesenthal was announcing to the world that he was following Mengele’s track – that he was about to capture him at any moment. He was describing every phase of his pursuit, every hideaway Mengele had just vacated, moments before Wiesenthal’s arrival – places where Mengele had never been.”

Degrelle said, though, that he was not afraid of the „contract” that the Jewish leaders had put out on him:

„I’ve seen other stuff, on the Eastern Front. I continue to live my life exactly as before, going to buy my newspapers myself in the street, drinking a glass quietly by the seashore. I am not going to poison what is left of my life with problems of security. I believe in my luck, and I believe in God. He will sort out the hunters of millions of dollars and the persecuted. I rely on His protection and on His justice.”

Although Degrelle was able to foil the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s campaign against him, his sworn enemies made one last attempt to dispose of the general.

Hebdo magazine, published by the French National Front, revealed on Dec. 27, 1985 that some 10 persons carrying Venezuelan passports and most likely connected with the Mossad arrived in Madrid for the purpose of once again attempting to kidnap Degrelle. Their plot, however, was again foiled by ever-vigilant Spanish authorities.

There may well have been other schemes launched against Degrelle, but the old general continued to live freely and to carry out his own personal crusade for truth in history.

Despite his advancing years, Gen. Degrelle embarked during this period on an ambitious project that would be his crowning triumph as a prolific wordsmith, befitting one once described as „one of the outstanding writers in the French language.” In his lifetime Degrelle had published more than 40 books and essays ranging from poetry to economics, from architecture to history, but the new project was one of massive scope.

The Belgian statesman began working on a projected 14-volume series to be collectively titled *The Hitler Century*, focusing (obviously) on the role of Adolf Hitler in the 20th century and his influence beyond.

Degrelle relished the opportunity to be able to speak freely and valued the chance to be able to have his thoughts expressed in the English language to audiences who certainly never had the opportunity to hear „the other side” expressed in such heartfelt language from one who was there.

The general wryly noted at the time that, „Whenever I hear the Allied side of history, I am often reminded of the reporter sent to report on a brawl. He scrupulously recorded all the blows delivered by one side and none from the other. His story would truthfully bear witness to the aggression of one side and the victimization of the other. But he would be lying by omission. I do not deny anything that Hitler did, but I also point out what the Communists and their Western allies did, and I let the public be the judge.”

Degrelle was guaranteed that he would receive all the necessary funding for the project, and in short order, Degrelle turned out the first volume, a handsome book published by the Institute for Historical Review (IHR), then based in Torrance, California, which Willis Carto had founded in 1978 and which had become the driving force behind what has come to be known as the historical revisionist movement.

Degrelle’s first volume – an indisputable masterpiece – was *Hitler: born at Versailles*. Based upon the premise that „there would never have been a Hitler without the Versailles Treaty” and that the history of Hitler and Germany can be

understood only within the context of the Versailles Treaty and the harsh subjugation of Germany by its implacable enemies, Degrelle's 535-page volume surveyed the Franco-British intrigues in the affairs of Central Europe, the systematic betrayal of Wilson's Fourteen Points, the secret treaties that doomed Wilson's mission from the start, and the cynical dividing up of vast territories by the major powers concluded without regard to the will of the millions of hapless inhabitants – the mutilation of Germany and Austria-Hungary that parceled out many millions of Germans (and German Austrians), Hungarians and others like cattle to the hostile rule of alien neighboring countries.

Widely hailed upon its release – with readers worldwide eager for more from Degrelle's pen – this first volume laid the foundation for the forthcoming series of books to follow. The proposed additional volumes were: *Hitler Democrat*; *Hitler and the Germans*; *Hitler and the Church*; *Hitler and the United States*; *Hitler and Stalin*; *Hitler and England*; *Hitler and France*; *Hitler and the Banks*; *Hitler and the Communists*; *Hitler and the Jews*; *Hitler the Politician*; *Hitler the Military Strategist*; and *Hitler and the Third World*.

Enthusiastic about the new project the general threw himself into his work with a devotion that was remarkable. At 79 years of age, Degrelle had tackled a project that few men of any age would ever even dream of attempting to undertake. By 1993 Degrelle had completed six additional volumes, and the IHR was into the translation and production of volumes II and III of the series when tragedy struck.

The IHR itself was taken over from within – literally at gunpoint – by a group of conspirators who were being supported in this treason from behind the scenes by a shadowy San Francisco real estate heir, who not only had intimate family ties to the legendary and powerful Straus family of New York's famed „Our Crowd“ Jewish elite, but who also had been engaged in activity (both in the Middle East and Asia) traceable directly to the intrigues of Israel's intelligence agency, the Mossad, and allied elements inside the American CIA.

So the forces behind the IHR destruction were certainly the same forces that had conspired for so long against Degrelle. Thus, it is absolutely no surprise that, immediately after the takeover, the cabal now controlling the IHR targeted Gen. Degrelle's *Hitler Century* series, with the intention – which was successful – of terminating it.

The IHR assassins went out of their way to attack the general's work. One affidavit filed by the conspirators referred to Degrelle's works as being an embarrassment to the IHR because they were „flagrantly pro-Hitler.“ Another described Degrelle's monumental work as a „white elephant with a big swastika on its side.“

The campaign against the Belgian general was bizarre to say the least, if only because Degrelle's *Hitler Century* series had been one of the IHR's most highly regarded projects.

What's more, the sales of the first volume, *Hitler: born at Versailles*, had been a tremendous financial boon for the IHR, and it had been expected that the forthcoming volumes would also be equally popular.

In any case, the subversion of Degrelle's work clearly laid bare the agenda and motivations of the group now in control of the IHR: their mission was to destroy the historical revisionist movement at its core. And the legacy of Degrelle was a primary target.

Ironically, however, thousands of miles away in Spain, Gen. Degrelle did not know of the treason at the IHR and was continuing his work, believing that the manuscripts he had completed were safe in the hands of the IHR and being systematically readied for release. However, what happened next was an episode difficult to comprehend by a normal human mind. On Jan. 28, 1994 a letter was sent to Degrelle by the conspirators. The letter read as follows:

Dear General Degrelle:

It is our difficult task to inform you that an editorial review here has established that, as so far received, the several volumes on the biography of Adolf Hitler you have submitted are unpublishable. The problems include: A fundamental lack of historical objectivity; numerous errors of fact; excessive reliance on other texts, either properly cited or with citation omitted; frequent repetitions.

At this time, supported by our board of directors and on the advice of our attorney, we must ask you to stop work on the Hitler project.

The letter was signed, „sincerely.“ In 1985, the author of the offending letter, in writing an introduction to Degrelle's *Campaign in Russia*, referred to Degrelle as „one of the great men of this or any century,“ and declared that, „Degrelle has no qualms about telling hard truths and making hard judgments.“

The conspirators at the IHR were in possession of the manuscripts Degrelle had completed. The *Hitler Century* series had been successfully killed. The conspirators refused to give up the precious manuscripts and as this is written (many years later) they have never been published and it is likely that they have been destroyed.

Although Degrelle was 87, he was still in remarkable health and retained full mental capacity. But the receipt of the malicious letter coupled with the events at the

IHR, coming at such a critical time in the twilight of his long career, hurt the general severely. He immediately sickened, and on April 1, 1994 the Angel of Death finally took this man who had cheated him so many times before. Communist bullets, flame-throwers, grenades, shrapnel, tanks, assassination squads, jailers and torturers could not kill Léon Degrelle, but treason did.

Degrelle's widow, Madame Jeanne Degrelle, commented in a letter of June 22, 1994 (published in the *Spotlight*):

„I take here the opportunity to affirm against the lies of these doubtful individuals. My husband was meticulous on all his historical facts; he was in possession of a huge pool of references, historical documents and writings at every level. All his works, past and future, were of the highest academic level. Numerous historians from the entire world paid tribute to him for his prodigious contribution to the history of the world.“

The tragic circumstances surrounding the final months of Gen. Degrelle and the loss of his valuable manuscripts must be a part of the record – unfortunate though the details may be – for they illustrate the lengths to which Degrelle's foes would go to silence this vibrant voice in history.

Yet, despite the outrageous turn of events that had led to the destruction of the IHR (and ultimately of Degrelle), all was not lost.

By the genuine grace of God, both Willis Carto and Degrelle's wife still controlled earlier drafts of some of Degrelle's writings and with Madame Degrelle's generous support and through a laborious process of careful reconstruction-requiring hundreds of man hours, including the efforts of multiple translators and editors – the staff of THE BARNES REVIEW (the new journal launched by Willis Carlo and loyal revisionists in 1994 in the wake of the IHR's destruction) was able to literally resurrect Degrelle's lost work – or certainly a significant part of it.

That surviving material – published in THE BARNES REVIEW over a period of years – is now, at long last, appearing in its entirety in *Hitler Democrat* between two covers for the first time.

So, in the end, this volume is not only a monumental work of history, a genuine epic, but it is also, in its own fashion, a tribute to the man behind it: General Léon Degrelle.

How then does one conclude what is admittedly an insufficient assessment of this remarkable man? Perhaps the defiant words of Gen. Degrelle himself sum it up best. Once, when asked by a journalist if he had any regrets about World War II,

Degrelle responded: „Only that we lost.”



A painting of Hitler relaxing with one his German shepherds. Hitler owned several German shepherds over the course of his life including Prinz, Muckl, Blonda and Blondi. After he was forced to give up his first shepherd, Prinz, due to poverty in Austria, the dog returned to him, and its loyalty earned Hitler’s life-long love for the breed.

CHAPTER 1

THE ENIGMA OF HITLER

Hitler, you knew him, what was he like? I have been asked that question a thousand times since 1945, and nothing is more difficult to answer. Approximately two hundred thousand books have dealt with the Second World War and with its central figure, Adolf Hitler. But has the real Hitler been discovered by any of them?

„The enigma of Hitler is beyond all human comprehension,” stated the *Zeit*, the liberal German newspaper.

Salvador Dali, art’s unique genius, attempted to solve it in one of his most intensely dramatic paintings. Lowering mountain landscapes all but fill the canvas, leaving only a few luminous meters of seashore dotted with delicately miniaturized human figures: the last witnesses to a dying peace. A huge telephone receiver dripping tears of blood hangs from the branch of a dead tree; and here and there hang umbrellas and bats whose portent is visibly the same.

As Dali tells it, „Chamberlain’s umbrella appeared in this painting in a sinister light, identified by the bat, and it affected me when I painted it as a thing of enormous anguish.”

He then confided: „I felt this painting to be deeply prophetic. But I confess that I haven’t yet figured out the Hitler enigma either. He attracted me only as an object of my wild imaginings and because he projected before my eyes as a man with the gift of effecting incomparable change.”

What a lesson in humility for the critics who have rushed into print since 1945 with their thousands of „definitive” books, most of them scornful, about this man who so troubled the introspective Dali that forty years later he still felt anguished and uncertain in the presence of his own hallucinatory painting.

Apart from Dali, who else has ever tried to present an objective portrayal of this extraordinary man whom Dali labeled the most explosive figure in human history?

The mountains of Hitler books based on blind hatred and ignorance do little to describe or explain the most powerful man the world has ever seen. How, I ponder, do these thousands of disparate portraits of Hitler in any way resemble the man I knew? The Hitler seated beside me, standing up, talking, listening. It has become

almost impossible to explain to people fed fantastic tales for decades that what they have read or have heard on television just does not correspond to the truth.

People have come to accept fiction, repeated a thousand times over, as reality. Yet they have never seen Hitler, never spoken to him, never heard a word from his mouth. The very name of Hitler immediately conjures up a grimacing devil, the fount of all one's negative emotions. Like Pavlov's bell, the mention of Hitler is meant to dispense with substance and reality. In time, however, history will demand more than these summary judgments.

Hitler is always present before my eyes: as a man of peace in 1936, as a man of war in 1944. It is not possible to have been a personal witness to the life of such an extraordinary man without being marked by it forever. Not a day goes by but Hitler rises again in my memory, not as a man long dead, but as a real being who paces his office floor, seats himself in his chair, pokes the burning logs in his fireplace.

The first thing anyone noticed when he came into view was his small mustache. Countless times he had been advised to shave it off, but he always refused: people were used to him the way he was. He was not tall. Nor were Napoleon or Alexander the Great. Hitler had deep blue eyes that many found bewitching, although I did not find them so. Nor did I detect the electric current his hands were said to give off. I gripped them quite a few times and was never struck by this lightning.

His face showed emotion or indifference according to the passion or apathy of the moment at times he was as though benumbed, saying not a word, while his jaws moved as if they were grinding an obstacle to smithereens. Then he would come suddenly alive and launch into a speech directed at you alone, as though he were addressing a crowd of two million people at the Tempelhof airfield. Then he became as if transfigured. Even his complexion, otherwise rather dull, lit up as he spoke. And at such times, to be sure, Hitler was strangely attractive and as if possessed of magic powers.

Anything that might have seemed too solemn in his remarks, he quickly tempered with a touch of humor. The picturesque word, the biting phrase were at his command. In a flash he would paint a word-picture that brought a smile, or come up with an unexpected and disarming comparison. He could be harsh and even implacable in his judgments and yet almost at the same time be surprisingly conciliatory, sensitive and warm.

After 1945 Hitler was accused of every cruelty, but it was not in his nature to be cruel. He loved children. It was an entirely natural thing for him to stop his car and share his food with young cyclists along the road. Once he gave his raincoat to a derelict plodding in the rain. At midnight he would interrupt his work and prepare

the food for his dog, Blondi.

If he did not like cats, it was only because they ate birds.

He could not bear to eat meat, since it meant the death of a living creature. He refused to have so much as a rabbit or a trout sacrificed to provide his food. He would allow only eggs on his table, because egg-laying meant that the hen had been spared rather than killed.

Hitler's eating habits were a constant source of amazement. How could someone on such a rigorous schedule, who had taken part in tens of thousands of exhausting meetings from which he emerged bathed with sweat, often losing two to four pounds in the process; who slept only three to four hours a night; and who, from 1940 to 1945, carried the whole world on his shoulders while ruling over 380 million Europeans: how, I wondered, could he physically survive on just a boiled egg, a few tomatoes, two or three pancakes and a plate of noodles? But he did.

He drank only water. He did not smoke and would not tolerate smoking in his presence. At one or two o'clock in the morning he would still be talking, untroubled, close to his fireplace, lively, often amusing. He never showed any sign of weariness. Dead tired his audience might be, but not Hitler.

He was depicted as a tired old man. Nothing was further from the truth, in September of 1944, when he was reported to be fairly doddering, I spent a week with him. His mental and physical vigor were still exceptional. The attempt made on his life on July 20 had, if anything, recharged him. He took tea in his quarters as tranquilly as if we had been in his small private apartment at the chancellery before the war, or enjoying the view of snow and bright blue sky through his great bay window at Berchtesgaden.

At the very end of his life, to be sure, his back had become bent, but his mind remained as clear as a flash of lightning. The testament he dictated with extraordinary composure on the eve of his death, at three in the morning of April 30, 1945, provides us a lasting testimony. Napoleon at Fontainebleau was not without his moments of panic before his abdication. Caesar was dumbfounded at his assassination and covered his head with his toga when he saw his adopted son about to stab him in the chest Hitler simply breakfasted as on any other day, shook hands with his associates in silence, then went to his death as if he were going for a stroll.

When has history ever witnessed so enormous a tragedy brought to its end with such iron self-control?

Hitler's most notable characteristic was ever his simplicity. The most complex

of problems resolved itself in his mind into a few basic principles. His actions were geared to ideas and decisions that could be understood by anyone. The laborer from Essen, the isolated farmer, the Ruhr industrialist, and the university professor could all easily follow his line of thought. The very clarity of his reasoning made everything obvious.

His behavior and his lifestyle never changed even when he became the ruler of Germany. He dressed and lived frugally. During his early days in Munich, he spent no more than a mark per day for food. At no stage in his life did he spend anything on himself. Throughout his 13 years in the chancellery he never carried a wallet or ever had money of his own.

Hitler was self-taught and made no attempt to hide the fact. The smug conceit of intellectuals, their shiny ideas packaged like so many flashlight batteries, irritated him at times. His own knowledge he had acquired through selective and unremitting study, and he knew far more than thousands of diploma-decorated academics.

I don't think anyone ever read as much as he did. He read at least one book every day, always reading the end and the index first in order to gauge the book's interest for him. He had the power to extract the essence of each book and then store it in his computer-like mind. I have heard him talk about complicated scientific books with faultless precision, even at the height of the war.

His intellectual curiosity was limitless. He fairly lived on the writings of the most diverse authors, and nothing was too complex for his comprehension. He had a deep knowledge and understanding of Buddha, Confucius and Jesus Christ, as well as Luther, Calvin or Savonarola; of literary giants such as Dante, Schiller, Shakespeare, Goethe; and analytical writers such as Renan and Gobineau, Chamberlain and Sorel.

He had trained himself in philosophy by studying Aristotle and Plato. Although the latter did not fit into his system, Hitler was nevertheless able to extract what he deemed of value. He could quote entire paragraphs of Schopenhauer from memory, and for a long time carried a pocket edition of Schopenhauer with him. Nietzsche taught him much about willpower.

His thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. He spent hundreds of hours studying the works of Tacitus and Mommsen, military strategists like Clausewitz, or empire builders like Bismarck. Nothing escaped him: world history or the history of civilizations, the study of the Bible and the Talmud, Thomistic philosophy and all the masterpieces of Homer, Sophocles, Horace, Ovid, Titus Livius and Cicero. He knew Julian the Apostate as if he had been his contemporary.

His knowledge also extended to mechanics. He knew how engines worked; he

understood the ballistics of various weapons; and he astonished the best medical scientists with his knowledge of medicine and biology. The universality of Hitler's knowledge may surprise or displease those unaware of it, but it is nonetheless a historical fact: Hitler was one of the most cultivated men of the 20th century. A thousand times more so than Churchill, an intellectual mediocrity; or than Pierre Laval, with his mere cursory knowledge of history; or than Roosevelt; or Eisenhower, who never got beyond detective novels.

From his earliest years, Hitler was different from other children. He always had an inner strength and was guided by his spirit and his instincts.

He could draw skillfully when he was only 11 years old. His sketches made at that age show a remarkable firmness and liveliness, in particular his portrait of Wallenstein.

His first paintings and watercolors, created at age 15, are full of poetry and sensitivity. One of his most important works, *The Utopian Fortress*, also shows him to have been an imaginative artist.

His artistic orientation took many forms. He wrote poetry from the time he was a lad. He dictated a complete play to his sister Paula, who was amazed at his creation. At the age of 16, in Vienna, he launched into the creation of an opera. He even designed the stage settings, as well as all the costumes; and, of course, the characters were Wagnerian heroes. More than just an artist, Hitler was above all an architect. Hundreds of his works are notable as much for the architecture as for the painting. From memory alone he could reproduce in every detail the onion dome of a church or the intricate curves of wrought iron. Indeed, it was to fulfill his dream of becoming an architect that Hitler went to Vienna at the beginning of the century.

When one sees the hundreds of paintings, sketches and drawings he created at the time which reveal his mastery of three-dimensional figures, it is astounding that his examiners failed him in two successive interviews. The German historian Werner Maser, no friend to Hitler, castigated his examiners: „All of his works revealed extraordinary architectural gifts and knowledge. The builder of the Third Reich gives the former Fine Arts Academy of Vienna cause for shame.”

Impressed by the beauty of the church in a Benedictine monastery where he was part of the choir and served as an altar boy, Hitler dreamt fleetingly of becoming a Benedictine monk. And it was at that time, too, interestingly enough, that whenever he attended Mass, he always had to pass beneath the first swastika he had ever seen: it was graven in the stone escutcheon of the abbey portal.

Hitler's father, a customs officer, hoped the boy would follow in his footsteps

and become a civil servant His tutor encouraged him to become a monk. Instead the young Hitler went, or rather he fled, to Vienna. And there, thwarted in his artistic aspirations by the bureaucratic mediocrities of academia, he turned to isolation and meditation. Lost in the capital of Austria-Hungary, he searched for his destiny.

April 20, 1889 did not mean anything to anybody in the first 30 years of Hitler's life. He was born on that date in Braunau, a small town in the Inn valley. During his exile in Vienna, he often thought of his modest home and particularly of his mother. When she fell ill, he went home to look after her. For weeks he nursed her, did all the household chores, and supported her as the most loving of sons. When she finally died, on Christmas eve, his pain was immense. Wracked with grief, he buried his mother in the little country cemetery.

„I have never seen a son grieve so much,“ said his mother's doctor, who happened to be Jewish. In his room Hitler always displayed an old photograph of his mother. The memory of the mother he loved was with him until the day he died. Before leaving this Earth, on April 30, 1945, he placed his mother's photograph in front of him.

She had blue eyes like his and a similar face. Her maternal intuition told her that her son was different from other children. She acted almost as if she knew her son's destiny. When she died, she felt anguished by the immense mystery surrounding her son.

Apart from his mother, Hitler lived the life of an anchorite throughout his youth. His greatest wish was to withdraw from the world. At heart a loner, he wandered about, ate meager meals, but devoured the books of three public libraries. He abstained from talking and had few friends.

It is almost impossible to imagine another such destiny where a man started with so little and reached such heights. Alexander the Great was the son of a king. Napoleon was a general at 24 and the protégé of Robespierre, besides coming from a well-to-do family. Fifteen years after Vienna, Hitler would still be an unknown corporal. Thousands of others had a thousand times more opportunity to leave their mark on the world.

Hitler had not yet focused on politics, but without his rightly knowing it, that was the career to which he was most strongly called. Politics would ultimately blend with his passion for art. People, the masses, would be the clay the sculptor shapes into an immortal form. That human clay would become for him a beautiful work of art like a Myron-of-Eleutherae marble, a Hans Makart painting, or a Wagner's *Ring Trilogy*.

His love of music, art and architecture had not in fact taken him away from the political and social events of Vienna. In order to survive, he worked as a common laborer side by side with other workers. He was a silent spectator, but nothing escaped him: not the vanity and egoism of the bourgeoisie, nor the moral and material misery of the people, nor yet the hundreds of thousands of workers who surged down the wide avenues of Vienna with anger in their hearts.

He had also been taken aback by the growing presence in Vienna of bearded Jews wearing caftans, a sight unknown in Linz.

„How can they be Germans?“ he asked himself.

He read the statistics: in 1860 there were 69 Jewish families in Vienna; 40 years later there were 200,000. They were everywhere. He saw them throwing rope ladders from their balconies to help other Jews climb up. He saw them invade the universities, the legal and medical professions, and take over the newspapers.

Hitler had been exposed from within the ranks of the workers to the reaction created by this influx, but the workers were not alone in reacting.

There were many prominent persons in both Austria and Hungary who did not hide their resentment at what they believed was an alien invasion of their country. The mayor of Vienna, a Christian Democrat and a powerful orator, was eagerly listened to by Hitler.

Hitler was also concerned with the fate of the eight million Austrian Germans kept apart from Germany and thus deprived of their rightful German nationhood. He saw Emperor Franz Josef as a bitter and petty old man unable to cope with the problems of the day and the aspirations of the future.

Hitler still held his peace, but he was summing things up in his mind. First Austrians were part of Germany, the common fatherland. Second: The Jews were aliens within the German community. Third: Patriotism was only valid if it was shared by all classes. The common people with whom Hitler had shared grief and humiliation were just as much a part of the fatherland as the millionaires of high society. Fourth: Class war would inevitably condemn both workers and bosses to ruin in any country. No country can survive class war; only cooperation between workers and bosses can benefit the country. Workers must be respected and live with decency and honor. Creativity must never be stifled.

When Hitler later said that he had formed his social and political doctrine in Vienna, he told the truth. Ten years later his observations made in Vienna would become the order of the day.

Thus Hitler was to live for several years in the crowded city of Vienna a virtual outcast, yet quietly observing everything around him. His strength came from within. He did not rely on anybody to do his thinking for him. Exceptional human beings always feel lonely amid the vast human throng. Hitler saw his solitude as a wonderful opportunity to meditate and not become submerged in a mindless sea.

In order not to be lost in the wastes of a sterile desert, a strong soul seeks refuge within himself. Hitler was such a soul.

The lightning in Hitler's life would come from the word. All his artistic talent would be channeled into his mastery of communication and eloquence. Hitler would enchant and be enchanted by it. He would find total fulfillment when the magic of his words inspired the hearts and minds of the masses he communed with. He would feel reborn each time he conveyed with mystical beauty the knowledge he had acquired in his lifetime. Hitler's incantatory eloquence will remain, for a very long time, a vast field of study for the psychoanalyst. The power of Hitler's word is the key.

Without it there could never have been a Hitler era.

Did Hitler believe in God?

He believed deeply in God. He called God the Almighty, master of all that is known and unknown.

Propagandists portrayed Hitler as an atheist. He was not. He had contempt for hypocritical and materialistic clerics, but he was not alone in that. He believed in the necessity of standards and theological dogmas, without which, he repeatedly said, the great institution of the Christian church would collapse. These dogmas clashed with his intelligence, but he also recognized that it was hard for the human mind to encompass the problems of creation, its limitless scope and breathtaking beauty. He acknowledged that every human being had spiritual needs.

The song of the nightingale, the pattern and color of a flower, continually brought him back to the great problems of creation. No one in the world has spoken to me so eloquently about the existence of God. Not because he was brought up as a Christian (Christianity had rather shocked him initially), but because his analytical mind bound him to the concept of God. Hitler's faith transcended formulas and contingencies. God was for him the basis of everything, the ordainer of all things, of his destiny and that of all others.

Hitler was not much concerned with his private life. In Vienna he had lived in sordid, vermin-infested lodgings. But for all that he rented a piano that took up half

of his room and concentrated on composing his opera.

He lived on bread, milk and vegetable soup. His poverty was real. He did not even own an overcoat. He swept streets on snowy days. He carried luggage at the railway station. He spent many weeks in shelters for the homeless. But he never stopped painting or reading.

Despite his dire poverty, Hitler somehow managed to maintain a clean appearance. Landlords and landladies in Vienna and Munich all remembered him for his civility and pleasant disposition. His behavior was impeccable. His room was always spotless, his meager belongings meticulously arranged, and his clothes neatly hung or folded. He washed and ironed his own clothes, something which in those days few men did. He needed almost nothing to survive. The sale of a few paintings was sufficient to attend to all his needs.

The First World War was a turning point in his life. He regarded it as the hand of destiny.



Adolf Hitler fought in many of the biggest battles in World War I and was injured by a shell at the battle of the Somme, before he was assigned as an adjutant to his Regimental Headquarters. This photo is from 1914, and shows Hitler with a long mustache – that he was later ordered to trim.

CHAPTER 2

THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER

In August 1914 the unknown artist would become the unknown soldier. His name was not even spelled correctly: It reads „Hietler“ in the administrative reports. No one had any idea of his vocation as a painter or of his passion for music. As for his gift for oratory, he hardly had any idea of it himself. He would have to reach thirty before becoming suddenly aware of it.

Moreover, no one in Germany had an inkling of the dream motivating this unknown Austrian soldier come to Munich from Vienna, the passionate dream of a unified greater Germany. But in Munich, a tailor named Popp, who had rented Hitler a little room, recalled the inscription posted at the head of his roomer's bed:

*Freely with open heart we are waiting for you.
Full of hope and ready for action,
We are expecting you with joy.
Great German fatherland, we salute you.*

Hitler lived in Munich on Schleisshimerstrasse, not far from Number 106, where another avid reader like himself lived in anonymity under the name of Mayer. His real name was Ilyitch Ulyanov, later changed to Lenin.

Irony of ironies: Hitler and Lenin walked the same narrow street without ever knowing each other or ever dreaming that their doctrines would one day clash in the greatest war in history.

At Number 34, Hitler spent hundreds of hours painting and reading without ever receiving any visitors. As in Vienna, he lived like a hermit pondering the salvation of Western civilization. Lenin, on the other hand, plotted its destruction.

On August 1, 1914, Hitler's life of books, art and solitude was suddenly shattered. Without the slightest hesitation he abandoned his art and studies and cast away everything in his then civilian life as a miraculously healed paralytic might throw off his crutches:

„To be able finally to prove before God the sincerity of my convictions was a true blessing. I also knew that when the time came, an inner voice would show me the way.“

In Hitler's view, the war would set everything to rights. In combat, only character would count. „A board chairman is on equal footing with a dog clipper when they go in the army." The petty and avaricious bourgeois world he held in contempt would be swept away. „For me it was a deliverance. I am not ashamed to say it today: I fell on my knees and thanked God."

Millions of Europeans all across Europe would feel the same way. „To Berlin!" shouted the French. „To Paris!" shouted the Germans. In those days of whipped up patriotism worker and peasant alike were at a fever pitch. But with Hitler, it was much more than a mere emotional outpouring; it was the bursting upon him of the conviction that the German people, artificially divided between Germans and Austrians, would be reunited at last by the war.

Ordinarily, Hitler should not even have been a soldier. For many years he had been afflicted with tuberculosis, and just a few months before the war, on Feb. 5, 1914, he had applied for military service and been turned away: „Unfit for the army or auxiliary corps. Too weak. Rejected."

He did everything in his power to overturn this decision. On Aug. 3, 1914, he sent a letter to the king of Bavaria begging to be allowed to enlist as a volunteer. His prayer was answered, and he was accepted into the army. He joined the 6th battalion of the 2nd Bavarian Infantry Regiment His comrade Hans Mend later recalled that when Hitler was issued his rifle, „He gazed on it with the same pleasure a woman takes in contemplating her diamonds." A few hours before leaving for the front, Hitler exclaimed: „I am very happy."

As their transport train passed the great statue of Germania on the Rhine, on October 1914, Hitler and his comrades in arms intoned the ancient battle song, the *Wacht am Rhein*. In a letter he wrote that day to his Munich landlady, Frau Popp, Hitler confessed, „I find it hard to contain my enthusiasm. How many times have I wished to test my strength and prove my national faith!"

That wish was now going to be fulfilled.

Yet Hitler was only one more foot soldier among thousands on the train heading for the battlefields of Flanders. In the context of the times no one in the world could have conceived that this volunteer soldier, who was not even a German nor yet a Bavarian, would rule Europe from Narvik to Maicop. Hitler, however, never doubted that the war would seal his appointment with destiny.

Hitler would fight in all of the worst battles: Yser, Ypres, Flandern, Neuve Chapelle, La Bassee, Arras, Artois, Somme, Fromelles, Alsace- Lorraine, Ailette, Montdidier, Soissons, Rheims, Oise, Marne, Champagne, Vosle, Monchy, Bapaume.

All within four years. He was wounded on Oct 5, 1916 and hospitalized for two months. Then he was back at the front until Oct. 15, 1918 when he had to be hospitalized again, this time for gas poisoning.

Throughout the war he was cited for valor and distinguished conduct in the field. He was awarded the Iron Cross, 2nd class; the Bavarian Military Medal, 3rd class with bar; the Iron Cross, 1st class. While both officers and men acquired great respect for his heroism and selflessness, Hitler's only concern was that he might have done more.

By 1918, the First World War was drawing to an end. The German army in combination with Lenin and Trotsky had destroyed Russia. Gen. Erich Ludendorff, a military genius, was able to redeploy his troops from the East to the West and inflict blow after blow against the British and French troops during the months of May, June and July of 1918. French historian Raymond Cartier assessed the situation:

The Russian front was gone. All Germany's best divisions, all the heavy artillery, all the men less than 35 years old went surging back toward the west. For the first time since the beginning of hostilities, Germany was going to have the advantage of superior numbers: 192 divisions against 174 on the Franco-British front. The British-led Entente was about to collapse.

Hitler's old regiment, the List Regiment, took part in this final offensive from start to finish. Hitler and his comrades advanced victoriously, crossing the Ailette River at Anizy, the Aisne at Pont Fontenoy, and finally reached and crossed the Marne, the gateway to Paris. It was July 14, 1918, Bastille Day, the national holiday decreed by the Grand Orient warlords to celebrate the genocide they had inflicted on the French people a century before, but the festivities were cut short as everyone grew anxious at the heavy rumble of German artillery heard by.

Hitler was among the spearhead troops. „Corporal Hitler,“ Cartier stated, „was in all probability one of the German soldiers who got closest to Paris in 1918.“

In fact, Hitler nearly succeeded in pulling off the most sensational coup of the war: the capture of Clemenceau, the French premier. In panic, the Grand Orient establishment had dispatched Clemenceau to the front to bolster the troops' morale, which was by then very low. Exhorting the men to charge ahead, Clemenceau tried to show them the way and found himself surrounded by Germans. At the last moment he just managed to getaway, barely escaping capture by a matter of minutes. Among the soldiers in the patrol that thus nearly captured Clemenceau was Cpl. Adolf Hitler. Another of history's ironies!

One can imagine Clemenceau brought into the List Regiment camp by Corporal

Hitler. Instead of posturing as „Father Victory,“ the name the Grand Orient had cooked up for him, he would have been just another dejected prisoner of war led to detention by none other than Hitler.

Hitler’s war heroism is a matter of record and has been acknowledged by both the military and all his comrades in arms. Only when Hitler became involved in politics was his war record suddenly challenged.

When the political hacks of the Weimar Republic tried to discredit Hitler’s war record in a desperate attempt to stem his rising popularity, they were taken to court. In a judgment rendered on March 10, 1932 in Hamburg, Hitler’s detractors, who included Heinrich Braune and the Auer & Company enterprises, were condemned, forced to recant and to pay damages. The transcript of the judgment can be found in the federal archives at Koblenz.

After Germany’s defeat in 1945, history really belonged to the victors, and the political „historians“ had a field day, saying anything and everything against Hitler.

It has taken more than half a century for real historians to set the record straight once again for the sake of integrity and historical truth.

One thing certain and indisputable is that Hitler spent his four years of war in the front lines. He took part in more than forty battles, and he was wounded and gassed; so his medals were hard-earned: his Iron Cross 2nd Class (on Dec. 2, 1914), his Cross of Military Merit, a special decoration conferred upon the wounded; and finally his Iron Cross 1st Class.

Lt. Col. Michael Freiherr von Godin, in his official request that Hitler be awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class, stated: „He was a model of coolness and courage in both trench warfare and assault combat He was always ready to volunteer for carrying messages in the most difficult and dangerous situations.“

Col. Anton Tubeuf, who made the presentation to Hitler of the above decoration, which is only very rarely awarded to enlisted men or to corporals, further stated:

He was always ready to help out in any situation, always volunteered for the most difficult, the most arduous and the most dangerous missions, and to risk his life and well-being for the Fatherland. On a human level, I felt closer to him than to any of the other men.

Col. Walter Spatny, in command of the 16th Regiment, was no less affirmative: „Hitler inspired all his comrades. They were impressed by his peerless courage and

devotion to duty, particularly in combat His qualifications, modesty and his admirable sobriety earned him the greatest respect of his comrades and superiors alike."

In 1922, at a time when Hitler was still unknown, Gen. Friedrich Petz summarized the High Command's appreciation of the gallant and self-effacing corporal as follows: „Hitler was quick in mind and body and had great powers of endurance. His most remarkable qualities were the personal courage and daring which enabled him to face any combat or perilous situation whatsoever."

None of the officers who reported Hitler's war record had at the time any other motivation than that of stating the truth. They were under no pressure and offered no advantage to state otherwise. That is why professional historians now base their evaluation of Hitler's war record on this wide selection of testimony from army records.

Even the historians least favorable to Hitler, such as Joachim C. Fest, concede that „Hitler was a courageous and efficient soldier and was always a good comrade." Sebastian Haffner, a Jewish writer and a fanatical Hitler hater, was forced to admit that, „Hitler had a fierce courage unmatched by anyone at the time or since."

After the failed attempts to discredit Hitler during the period of the Weimar Republic, his war record was unchallenged even by the Jewish and British propaganda machines. His readiness to help others was so noted during the war was thus nothing new. A Jew by the name of Karl Hanisch, who was a fellow lodger of Hitler's at an inn one time, recalled him as a pleasant and likeable man who took an interest in the welfare of all his companions.

„No one ventured to take liberties with Hitler," Hanisch later related, „but he was neither proud nor arrogant, and he was always available and willing to help. If someone needed 50 hellers to pay for another night's lodging, Hitler would give whatever he had in his pocket without another thought. On several occasions I personally saw him take the initiative and pass the hat for such a collection."

At the front he never tried to impress anyone. He was friendly to all. Various photographs of Hitler at the front show him happily sharing a meal or time of rest with his comrades. One aspect of his character, however, set him apart from his fellows: his politeness. Amid all the swearing and gutter language of the trenches, his speech remained measured and polite. That was his nature, and it was impossible for him to be otherwise whether in speech or writing.

He believed rudeness was the death of communication and the supreme insult Yet he did not reproach anyone else for rude or obscene utterances other than by a stem look. He never laughed at dirty jokes and never took part in the brothel humor

and endless discussion of sexual exploits that were common currency in those days of war. Instinctively he shunned undue familiarity and was offended by it in others. One would expect that Hitler must have been taunted mercilessly as a prude in such an environment, yet it was not so. Somehow, he earned a respect that men seldom grant to other men.

Historians have often remarked that in material possessions Hitler was born poor and died poor. He regarded money only as a servant, for the fulfillment of humanity's needs, and never as a master. In Vienna or at the front, his generosity was proverbial. He was always ready to give half his rations to a soldier who appeared hungrier than he was. He also gave out his own blankets because he felt others needed them more than he did. Yet he was probably the most deprived member of the regiment. He never received food parcels and had only his own meager rations to offer. And just as he always helped people in need, he always showed compassion for animals and plants. He felt they were all an integral part of the great wheel of life and should be loved and respected. Human harmony with the animal and plant world was a topic he often raised with me.

One day in the trenches Hitler came upon a terrier that in chasing a rat had passed from the English trenches into the German sector. He adopted the little dog, named it Fuschl, and showered it with attention. He taught the dog to take shelter on command and made sure it always had food and water. The two were constant companions. Then the dog was stolen from him. A quarter of a century later he still could not speak of it without sorrow. He suffered more from that than from the cold and hunger and appalling conditions of the trenches. The Hollywood version of a cruel and maniacal Hitler was created for war propaganda purposes but was totally devoid of truth.

At first, Hitler's eagerness to volunteer for the most desperate missions was puzzling to the other men. They thought he was overdoing it and at first would say, „Just because Hitler's an idiot is no reason we should be.“ But their mocking puzzlement was soon replaced by a respectful awe, and they became convinced that some special fate protected him. In moments of great fear, when death was striking on all sides, other soldiers instinctively clung near to him, for 10 times he had escaped death when he should have been killed.

Cartier cites a very precise case: „On Nov. 17, 1917, just outside Wytschaete, a British shell penetrated into a cellar that was being used by Hitler's regiment as a command post and exploded there, resulting in horrible carnage. All the occupants were killed or wounded and maimed. Hitler alone was spared. Only seconds before the explosion he had been sent to carry a message under a hail of enemy fire. He delivered the message unscathed.“

The times Hitler cheated death became a legend that has baffled historians ever since. Hitler defied the odds so many times it is difficult to consider it mere chance. Little is known about the forces that seem to shield predestined men from danger and death. But they were always recognized as fact by our Keltic and Germanic ancestors, and they are very much recognized by Asian and Arabic peoples today. In any event, these forces were to protect Hitler all his life.

In November 1939 he finished a speech in Munich three minutes ahead of schedule. After he had gone from the podium a bomb exploded. As if in answer to a secret summons, he had left just in time to escape being blown to pieces.

On July 20, 1944, Claus von Stauffenberg's time bomb was placed, in a briefcase, right beside Hitler's feet in his headquarters briefing room. The man sitting next to Hitler thought it a rude thing to do and moved it away. Without this simple gesture Hitler would have been blown to bits. As it happened, the bomb only managed to tear up Hitler's clothing.

Hitler did not panic for an instant „It's a British bomb. The flash was yellow,“ he casually remarked as if his own fate were not worth talking about

Historians have often adverted to this pattern of Hitler's survival during the First World War. In 1916 the Battle of the Somme was the scene of the slaughter of more than a million Europeans, mostly French and Germans. The List Regiment was holding out among the ruins of a village called Le Barque. Out of nine couriers, seven had just been killed. The trenches had been destroyed under constant bombardment, and the troops were holed up here and there in the shell craters. The command post, comprising 10 officers and two couriers, was located in the cellar of a flattened house. Suddenly a British bomb fell at the entrance and killed 11 of the 12; the survivor was Hitler.

Hitler himself told the noted English journalist Andrew Price of a similar incident: „My comrades and I were eating our rations in a trench. All of a sudden it seemed that a voice was telling me, 'get up and get out of here.' It was an order so clear and insistent that I obeyed it automatically, as if it had been a military order. I got to my feet immediately and walked some 20 meters down the trench, carrying my meal with me in my mess tin. Then, my mind now at ease, I sat down to finish my meal. No sooner had I done so than there was a terrible explosion in the same part of the trench I had just left. A stray grenade had burst above the group of men with whom I had been sitting, and all of them had been killed.“

John Toland also wondered what fate protected Hitler „In the course of the preceding months he had escaped death on innumerable occasions. It was as if he had been wearing a good luck charm or had been a sorcerer.“ [Note: this translation

twice removed, from English to German to English, is no doubt far from authentic Toland. – Ed.]

Even Joachim Fest was struck by the strangeness of Hitler's immunity: „The courage and the composure with which he faced the most deadly fire made him seem invulnerable to his comrades. As long as Hitler is near us, nothing will happen to us, they kept repeating. It appears that made a deep impression on Hitler and reinforced his belief that he had been charged with a special mission.”

Corporal Hitler never ceased to astonish his comrades. He was always polite and helpful, never panicked, was always there when death struck, always survived, and whenever he had some free time he could be seen scribbling something: Hitler was writing poetry. While some 700 pieces of Hitler's paintings and drawings managed to survive destruction after World War II, his poems did not fare so well. Most of them disappeared in 1945 along with mountains of other stolen documents. Only 30 out of 2,000 have survived. Some ended up in the U.S. Congressional Archives in Washington. One poem composed in 1915 in a trench during the night was prophetic:

Often in the nights of bitterness /I see the oak of Wotan surrounded by a
silent lightning / Forging a union with mystical forces. / the Moon in its
bewitching magic inscribes runes. /Those who during the day were soiled /
Become purified by this magic formula / Thus the false are separated from the
genuine / And I arrive at a phalanx of swords.

His comrades had no idea that Hitler was writing poetry, let alone poetry of such depth. He kept his poems in his bag and never talked about them. When Hitler talked, it was to comment on such topics as defeatism and of Jews ensconced in plush offices back home sabotaging the war effort with strikes and subversion. He wanted to fire them all.

In the drab and deadly war of the trenches Hitler entertained his comrades with sketches and caricatures he could draw in a matter of seconds. He could appreciate the humor in any situation and created a much needed relief among the troops.

On days when he was off duty or during a combat lull Hitler painted scenes of the war's devastation as well as scenes of serene peace. The contrast was striking: on the one hand burned trees, torn bodies, trenches that had become mass graves; on the other, pastoral scenes of wheat fields, rivers, farm houses recalling the art of Poussin.

Hitler historian Werner Maser has described them:

The buildings, perceived horizontally, are striking in their luminous

delicacy of color shading. The watercolor titled *Haubourdin* that is dated 1916 is an enchantment: seen from the perspective of a German landscape painter, the foreign scene here becomes an experience that is intimate, familiar, alive and poetic. You would believe yourself to be within the walls of Nuremberg or Rothenburg. The art is light, animated, moving. The splendid drawing *Ardoye en Flandre*, which dates from the summer of 1917, is part of a group with two other plates that are not dated, *Shelter at Tonnes* and *House with a White Fence*. All these works reveal exceptional architectural attainments and talent

England's own great artist Edward Gordon Craig is no less laudatory: „Hitler's watercolors of the First World War are artistic works of real value." The experts and collectors of today who vie to acquire Hitler's works at enormous prices certainly confirm Craig's assessment.

The men at the front generally were only interested in sketches of themselves that Hitler gave them to send their families. There was one man, nevertheless, who stole Hitler's leather case in which he carefully kept all his drawings, sketches and watercolors. Years later all the works it contained reappeared in a curio shop in Munich. An admirer bought them and sent them to Hitler, who by then had become the chancellor of Germany.

Hitler's comrades from the war, however, above all remembered his impromptu bursts of oratory. The men always listened and never missed a word. A sign of things to come.

CHAPTER 3

LESSONS FROM THE FRONT

From 1914 to 1919, the front would become Hitler's second field of observation. No longer is he, as in Vienna, a mere spectator. He is thrown in with millions of men all subject to the same laws as himself. With them he must share not only combat, but every minute of everyday life in wartime.

Hitler, always prim and proper, must submit to this gigantic promiscuity, this massed mingling of persons. He does so willingly and feels himself completely one with his people. Instinctively he knows his fate is linked with theirs.

He lives the brotherhood of men who share hardship, suffering, fear and the constant nearness of death. It is a brotherhood that is strengthened by each passing day of war, giving rise to the kind of solidarity that since Vienna he had felt was a primary political necessity. He now realizes that men are basically team workers and that class warfare is utterly against human nature. He sees men who only a few weeks before were hurled against one another by their Marxist handlers, now harmoniously working side by side.

Hitler reasons that if all classes of society can be so naturally united when facing sacrifice at the front, they certainly could be united in work and national salvation back home.

He also observes that mental and physical work are incomplete by themselves and can never be separated. The physical worker must be guided by thought, as the mental worker must rely on physical power in order to achieve anything. This is the crux of an immense social problem that Hitler sees resolved at the front. This revelation will be imprinted in him forever. He is part of the people and understands its great potential.

If men can live united in the trenches, why should they be disunited in civilian life? To this Hitler already has the answer. Disunity and discord are artificially engineered by social parasites to the massive detriment of the majority of the people.

Hitler concluded that all so-called social warfare – employees against employers, generation against generation, gender against gender – is fomented by corrupt and greedy manipulators only bent on enslaving the people. Any type of class warfare goes against the very fabric of humanity, goes against both the rights of the individual and of the community. No society can exist without the unity and

cooperation of its members. Hitler also reflects that class warfare never benefited any of the parties manipulated into such conflicts. It was a total loss for the country, the people, the individuals, and even the manipulators, who invariably find themselves ruling over a society in rubble.

Hitler's faith in popular sovereignty, unity and brotherhood was born at the front He is a democrat in the purest sense of the word.

Hitler told me he had learned more at the front than he would have studying at universities for thirty years. The front is a fountain of knowledge without equal. For Hitler, knowing and understanding human beings had to precede all other knowledge. Scientific knowledge would naturally follow in the path established by human psychology.

If Hitler later received such overwhelming support from the people, it was only because he had the knowledge of every fiber of human psychology which he acquired at the front.

The qualities that earned him the respect of his comrades in arms were still the same when later he addressed crowds of millions: He was at one with the people. He never had to use bombastic and empty political jargon. Every word he uttered hit home. He really spoke for the people.

The front also gave Hitler that which would be his supreme strength during the conquest of power and afterwards, when he had become chancellor, his sense of authority. Nothing great can be achieved without the strength of character of the one in command, the one who can think and motivate and take responsibility. Without firm authority, not a single trench would hold out: and without a stable and lasting command, no far-reaching plans, either offensive or defensive, would even be conceivable. The one who commands and those who obey must constitute but a single force. Decisions must always be in the hands of one given the authority, the responsibility and the time to realize them. Authority, responsibility, continuity. These were the lessons Hitler learned at the front, and these were the basis of the new social order Hitler would establish.

Civic life, public order, social justice, and the uniting of the classes, all subject to the same laws. The best must plan and direct and inspire with faith a consenting people to implement the plan. This is a sacred covenant without which no society can long exist. A society based on such principles will prosper and survive any peril. This is the democracy of excellence, not of mediocrity, when millions are freely giving their hearts and minds to the one who incarnates them.

Joachim Fest confirms the knowledge Hitler acquired during the war: War was

the major element in Hitler's formative period. It was an experience of a purely metaphysical order and one he totally accepted.

More than any military academy lectures, the war also taught Hitler the great laws of tactics. He saw how men fear and how that fear could be overcome by willpower. That courage is first of all not physical but moral. It is strength of character which instills value in a human being. Hundreds of times he witnessed the effects of panic: At the mere looming shape of a tank or even the sound of one in the distance, soldiers would be gripped with fear, ready to throw away their guns and flee.

Hitler observed how during these critical minutes a real leader could avert panic: He had the ability to convey in seconds that a headlong retreat of a quarter of a mile would mean certain death, since the enemy tanks would overtake them in minutes and they would then be defenseless.

Long after the First World War, in December 1941, if the German troops on the threshold of Moscow had withdrawn full tilt when weather of 30 to 40 degrees below zero struck, as some panicky Wehrmacht generals wanted to do. What would they have found 300 kilometers farther to the west? Exactly the same freezing cold! And with no contingency position left after having lost all their artillery and tanks in the snow and ice even before undertaking their retreat. To retreat is often to commit suicide.

Hitler had learned in the school of World War I that the man who wins, in combat or in political warfare, is the one who has the initiative, who has decided on his goal worked out his tactics, and hangs on to every gain: whereas the one under attack, caught short and generally hit at his weakest point, is at the bold one's mercy.

Another capital discovery Hitler would make at the school of the front was the power of propaganda.

From 1914 to 1918 German propaganda was disastrously null. The Allies, on the other hand, showed themselves to be master's in the use of the new weapon. Perhaps it contributed more to their victory than the new tanks and the millions of stalwart lads pouring in from faraway America in 1918.

The anti-German propaganda was incessant, relentless and in well-nigh apocalyptic bad faith.

The Germans had no sooner crossed Belgium than the legend was launched and spread worldwide that German soldiers were savagely cutting off the hands of Belgian children. This was a total lie. Not a single child, Belgian or otherwise, was

ever mutilated by German soldiers in the entire four years of the war. To say the least, it is incredible that so fantastic a lie could have been echoed to the very ends of the earth with no proof of any kind ever having been provided.

After the war, when Germany lay defeated and prostrate, with what cries of indignation would not the little victims have been brought forth if there had been any. None ever appealed, and the British quietly dropped the story – without, of course, apologizing for its monstrous mendacity.

The legend of the „cut-off hands,” along with that of babies thrown on bayonets and Red Cross nurses being shot by firing squads, was fed to the world for four entire years. It proved a powerful tool for generating hatred of Germany and all things German.

Another form of psychological warfare consisted in dropping „news from home” into the German trenches. The „news” described the misery gripping Germany, where babies had to be clothed in wrapping paper; the dead could not be buried in coffins because of a wood shortage, where people were starving, etc. The sheer repetition of this phony „news from home” had a definite impact on many exhausted soldiers. This type of propaganda warfare was an innovation at the time and certainly caught the Germans unprepared.

Hitler told me how stunned he was when he read those leaflets and kept asking, „Where is our own propaganda or at any rate our counterpropaganda?” The material certainly was not lacking. The German air force could have dropped truthful leaflets on the Allied trenches, describing for the soldiers how their vainglorious generals had sacrificed more than a million young men at the Somme, in Artois, and at the Chemin des Dames, just to conquer and then lose again a few hundred meters of ground; how their comrades lying dead between the trenches were being devoured by thousands of rats; how Allied soldiers were sent to their death after being filled with liquor; how politicians and generals were tearing at each other’s throats back home; how the huge shells of Big Bertha were falling right in the middle of Paris.

And what would have been the impact of the real news that Russia, the principal partner of the Allies, was in the throes of a violent revolution and that St. Petersburg had fallen to the Communists, which meant that German divisions brought back from the East would join the Western Front and outnumber the Allied forces? There was a wealth of material of devastating potential available without the need of a single lie, contrary to British propaganda.

The Germany of Wilhelm II was totally ignorant of propaganda and fought the war only with guns and cannon. If Germany lost the First World War, it was mostly

for not having used war's most powerful artillery: propaganda. That would be another lesson Hitler would never forget.

Hitler's bursts of indignation always had an attentive audience in the trenches. „Hitler's comrades," John Toland wrote, „were transfixed by his eloquence and loved to listen to him."

His comrades affectionately called him Ali and generally agreed that Hitler „lived in a world apart but that in every way he was a good man," as one soldier explained.

Hitler talked about bourgeois selfishness, the anarchy of imperial power, the mediocrity of its bureaucrats. Yet the men recalled a prophetic utterance he once made, „You will hear much of me one day. I am only waiting for my time to come."

Jackl Weiss, a fellow soldier, later told me: „We used to say that young Hitler might become a deputy of the Bavarian Landtag, but no one ever imagined he would one day be chancellor of the Reich."

In the opinion of Hitler's commanding officers, he was a superior soldier. Why then in four years of outstanding service was he not made an officer? He had been promoted to corporal in December 1914, and on Nov. 11, 1918 he would still be a corporal. Why? This was the same man who would prove to be the greatest military genius of the twentieth century, who between 1939 and 1942 would send his armies to conquer Europe from Oslo to Moscow, from Amsterdam to Athens, from Paris to the Caucasus Mountains.

Yet Hitler remained one of 400,000 corporals throughout the war despite his constant heroism and more than 40 combat citations.

Not unlike the Viennese professors who had kept Hitler out of art school, the officers kept him out of the commissioned ranks. The official reason: He lacked the ability to command.

A graphologist to whom a letter written by Hitler in 1915 was submitted for examination – without his having the slightest idea of who had written the letter – reported as follows:

„The author of this letter is endowed with great intelligence and a remarkable ability to assimilate knowledge and to adapt to any given situation. He represents a real power."

Hitler's commanding officer, however. Lt. Wiedemann, summarily excluded

Hitler with the verdict, „lacks capacity to command.“

Is it possible that just as in Vienna, the ensconced bureaucratic mediocrities could sense Hitler's talent and excluded him because of it? Talent and intelligence have always been the nightmare of tenured time-serving officials of any type. How many geniuses have been suppressed by such mediocrities?

For his part, Hitler made no response to this injustice. Garnering stripes on his sleeve was of no interest to him. He loved his dangerous job as a courier, and his agenda lay elsewhere. Such mediocre pettiness would be done away with anyhow in the program he was planning for Germany.

Near the end of 1916 Hitler was wounded with shrapnel and was hospitalized at the Beelitz hospital in Berlin. Two years later, after he had been gassed and awarded the Iron Cross First Class for valor, Hitler was sent, against his will, back to Germany. From these two short visits Hitler came back to the front appalled and sickened.

Life in Germany from 1916 to 1918 was far from comfortable. There were severe food shortages, and everything was rationed. But compared with the soldiers who were facing death 24 hours a day and had to supplement their starvation rations with rats they caught in the trenches, people in Germany could still go home at night and sleep peacefully; no one was being blown to pieces or crushed by tanks into barbed wire. Yet it was this relatively privileged life at home that would bring Germany's defeat.

Marxist financiers saw the war as their great opportunity: While millions of patriotic Germans were away fighting, the Communists would take over Germany with their hired gangs of agitators. At first their subversion was cautious, because the entire German people were fervently patriotic, and mock concern was shown for the people's hardship. Then agitators were sent to factories where they incited the workers to go on strike. They were duplicating the methods that had just destroyed Russia's war capabilities in Petrograd in October 1917. Despite this well-financed and widespread sabotage, Germany managed to hold out except in its capital, Berlin, which had the highest concentration of alien Marxist agitators. On Jan. 28, 1918, strikes were instigated that halted essential munitions factories for a week: 400.000 workers struck.

It was then that the soldiers fighting heroically at the front realized that saboteurs were stabbing them in the back.

The internal sabotage of Germans coincided with German military successes abroad. Russia was out of the war thanks to Marxist sabotage. The same Communists

who had destroyed Russia's army were now defenseless against the German army. They capitulated and signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, 1918. German victories had created a whole new world to the East. Countries like Finland, the Baltic States, Byelorussia, Crimea and Ukraine had governments friendly to Germany and totally opposed to Communism. The wealth and potential of the East was opened to German development. The stakes on the Western Front were minuscule compared with the East. It was Germany's future which was assured when Germany established diplomatic relations with a Russia reduced by half.

Gen. Ludendorff was rushing hundreds of thousands of soldiers from the East to the Western Front to overwhelm the Allies. Germany had never been closer to total victory than in the spring of 1918.

It was at this precise moment that the financiers of Communism intensified their subversion campaign inside Germany. A tired and anxious civilian population was an easy prey for the professional subversives such as the Liebknechts, the Luxemburgs, and the Eisners. All were Jews as were their handlers and fellow agitators from New York to Moscow. In the context of German society in 1918 this invasion of ruthless alien subversives bent on destroying the country from within was a totally new experience, against which good-natured and naive Germans were defenseless.

Hitler had already deemed organized Jewry to be a grave threat to any country when he witnessed the greed and ruthlessness of the Jewish invasion of Vienna. While he was in the hospital in Berlin, he had also witnessed how Jewish agitators were trying to demoralize convalescing soldiers, giving them instructions in how to malingering out the war. New recruits were demoralized with defeatist propaganda.

Hitler also noticed how many able-bodied young German Jews were comfortably sitting out the war in administrative positions while at the same time lending support to the Jewish Communist agitators. This outrage was echoed by Ludendorff: „It is imperative that we effect a much more vigorous recruiting of the young Jews, who up to now have been left altogether too undisturbed.”

Ludendorff was right, inasmuch as proportionately twice as many Germans as Jews died at the front.

Hitler was also revolted by the spectacle of Jews making fortunes out of the black market and other war profiteering enterprises. While German blood was flowing at the front Jews were getting rich at home and destroying the country with their Communist terrorists. Hitler was so outraged he could hardly speak except to utter, „They're in the process of making us lose the war; they're stabbing the country in the back.”

This feeling of being stabbed in the back was shared by many other Germans who had witnessed what Hitler had seen. It was also shared by non-Germans such as British Gen. Sir Frederick Maurice, who said virtually the same thing in a *Daily News* article subsequent to 1918; or French historian Raymond Cartier, who wrote, with respect to how the back-stabbing was felt throughout Germany, that Hindenburg, Otto Dibelius, head of the Evangelical Church, and Cardinal Faulhaber of Munich all agreed that Germany had been stabbed in the back." The stabbing, or Dolchstoß as it was known in Germany, was also compounded by the British and Jewish railroading of America into the war. John Toland describes Hitler's indignation and call for justice to avenge the „rivers of German blood."

During the first seven months of 1918, despite the sabotage at home, Germany was within an inch of winning the war. Marshal Foch, commander-in-chief of the Allied forces, admitted on July 15, 1918: „If Rheims falls, we have lost the war." Rheims was indeed the last point of Allied resistance. Because it was so near to victory, Germany felt the full impact of Jewish sabotage and the injection of a million American soldiers on the Allied side. Although the odds had shifted, German soldiers fought with unmatched heroism and tenacity and held the new Allied onslaught at a standstill. Raymond Cartier honestly admitted: „Nowhere was the German front broken. The Allies met with stubborn resistance everywhere. Captain von Helldorf, designated as interpreter at the Spa armistice talks, took 48 hours to cross the lines because German infantrymen would not cease fire. Only the absolute proof that an armistice had been signed induced the soldiers to cease fire, and they were still incredulous."

Hitler would not see these last few weeks of WWI in the trenches. Just a month before, during the night of Oct. 13, 1918, the British dropped thousands of mustard gas bombs on Hitler's regiment at Werwick, near Ypres in Flanders. At dawn some 400 blind men were wandering with raised arms, their eyes burning as if hot coals had pierced them. Hitler was one of them.

He was transported to the Pasewalk hospital in Pomerania, where he was pronounced blind. He recovered, but there would be some who would try to use this tragic injury against him. A general by the name of von Bredow, consumed with social and political hatred of Hitler, stated in pseudo medical jargon that Hitler „suffered from blindness hysteria." This nonsense was later picked up by the German Jewish „experts" on whom American intelligence depended to formulate American policy. In the National Archives in Washington can be found a „medical report" by a Jewish doctor named Kroner certifying the „psychopathy" of the blind Hitler to be „mental inferiority, generally conditioned by heredity, and marked especially by weakness of the will."

Another Jewish doctor, Rudolph Binion of Brandeis University, not to be

outdone, sank into Freudian ramblings wherein he traced the source of Hitler's mustard gas blinding to the odor of iodine present a quarter of a century earlier in the room where his mother lay dying. That tincture of iodine rising in his memory had rendered him insane!

„That mustard gas,” Binion wrote, „was an atomized liquid that burned the skin in the same way that iodoform does. Hitler associated that poison gas with his mother's iodoform when she was dying. When he was hospitalized at Pasewalk he must have been delirious and later given psychiatric treatment“.

It is not surprising that the United States government, fed such intelligence, was considered a pushover to be manipulated into two world wars by the Jewish and British warmongers.

The world had to wait until 1973 for these absurdities to be debunked finally by German historian Werner Maser, in his *Hitler's Letters and Notes*: „Assertions completely without foundation. Irrefutable documents prove that Hitler's temporary blindness was the consequence of poisoning by enemy gas. On Nov. 9, 1918 three young Jews burst into the Pasewalk hospital and triumphantly announced that the Germany of Wilhelm II was collapsing. Hitler heard the news with agony and, still blind, regained his bed. He pulled the blanket over his face and cried silently for hours: His country, his Fatherland lay prostrate, destroyed, perhaps forever.

Everything that had filled his mind and soul through the years, and that had hitherto found no outlet but in his harangues in the trenches, now rose up again in his heart. It was no longer possible for him to be passive. The struggle would continue in the only conceivable way left: Henceforward it would be moved from the trenches to the streets.

„All or nothing.“ he vowed. „I decided to become a political man.“

„On that night,” John Toland has written, „in the lonely ward of the Pasewalk hospital, the most prodigious force in the 20th century was born.“

CHAPTER 4

THE DEBACLE

Hitler would perhaps one day be „the most prodigious force in the 20th century,” but meanwhile he was nothing, and he knew it. „Having no name, I was least of all in a position to carry out any kind of useful action.” „No one had so few means, nor so insignificant a beginning,” wrote Joachim Fest. Hitler felt lonelier than he had ever been. Lonelier than in Vienna, because he had not yet formulated a political plan.

On Nov. 21, 1918, beginning to recover his sight, he left the hospital for his Munich barracks.

Alone and friendless, what chance did he have to save Germany? Certainly none at this stage, and he was not even a German.

What political program could you present anyhow to Germans who were struggling merely to survive? People were dying of hunger, and millions of veterans were unemployed.

Not surprisingly, those responsible for the famine and unemployment were now exploiting the situation. On Nov. 10, 1918 two separate republics were proclaimed in Berlin. One was headed by a bourgeois socialist named Scheidemann and the other by the Communist Jew Liebknecht.

Liebknecht also headed a terrorist group of Communist shock troops known as Spartacus. On that same day the Spartacists attacked the returning veteran officers, many of them wounded, ripping off their medals and epaulettes. It was the triumph of the revolution. All the former pillars of the Imperial Reich who could still have saved the day were instead seized with panic and stampeded out of the Reichstag. Stresemann, the conservative chief, locked himself in his office, stricken with fear. It took the economist Schacht to persuade Stresemann to come out and join the revolution: „The game is being played on the left, and on the left we must play. Let’s create a left-wing bourgeois party.” Stresemann grasped the suggestion and, with Schacht and other bourgeois opportunists, formed the German Democratic Party (DDP). The same Schacht and the same DDP would just as quickly switch to Hitler when the National Socialists came to power in 1933.

From November of 1918 to February of 1919 the Germans are terrorized by Communist thugs. Powerless, Hitler witnesses the ransacking of Munich by the

thugs of Jewish Communist boss Eisner.

In Berlin the Communists massacre more than ten thousand people in two months. The Communists, led by Jewish fanatics, are on the rampage throughout Germany.

Finally, salvation comes from Gustav Noske, a woodcutter by trade and a socialist in politics but at the same time a patriot at heart. Singlehandedly he assembles a small number of volunteers and veterans, arms them with whatever weapons he can find and confronts the Communists head on in the streets of Berlin. The patriots fight furiously against superior Marxist forces. Miraculously, they reconquer Berlin. Thousands of dead Communist thugs litter the streets, including the Jewish bosses Liebknecht and Luxemburg.

Unfortunately, Noske cannot be everywhere, and the Marxist rampage continues in the rest of Germany. In Bremen, Oldenburg, Brunswick, Hamburg, in the Ruhr and in Saxony, terror is rampant. But it is in Munich that terror reigns supreme. There, a Marxist madman, unclean, hairy, and an extravagant orator, seizes power and installs himself in the palace of the king of Bavaria, who has fled in panic. Kurt Eisner becomes dictator of Bavaria and orders the massacre of Bavarians. He also forges documents „proving Germany’s guilt for WWI” and sends them to Versailles.

Eisner declares war against Wuerttemberg and Switzerland. Finally, after months of bloody pandemonium, a young Bavarian officer 22 years of age risks his life and shoots the tyrant dead. The Bavarians acclaim him a hero, but the respite is short-lived. Lenin immediately dispatches three other Jewish dictators to replace the fallen Eisner: Lewien, Levine, and Axelrod. They are the troika of the Soviet Republic of Bavaria. From Lenin and Trotsky come these orders: „Triple wages, move workers into the rich districts, cancel the food ration cards of all non-workers.”

The „workers” in question are not workers but street thugs recruited by the Jewish commissars. Thus Lewien, Levine and Axelrod decide who is and who is not a worker. They proceed to massacre the educated, who are classified as „bourgeois.” On 29 April 1919 Countess Westcarp and the prince of Thum and Taxis are herded along with 20 other „class criminals” into an army barracks and summarily shot. Lenin’s Cheka chief, Latsis, tells Lewien, Levine and Axelrod: „We are eliminating the bourgeoisie as a class. You don’t need to prove to anybody he has acted against the Soviet Union; just ask a suspect to what class he belongs, where he lives, what education he has, and his trade. His answers should seal his fate.”

According to a departmental memo, even bourgeois children were to be deprived of milk coupons. Thus while „non-workers” as defined by the Cheka are

being massacred and starved to death, Lewien, Levine and Axelrod are wallowing in nonstop gluttony and orgies at the Munich royal palace. French historian Andre Brissaud will later describe the scenes: „While misery and hunger continue to increase unabated, arrests and summary executions are the order of the day. Meanwhile, the trio of ‘Russians’ is installed in the royal palace, where the champagne never stops flowing and orgies with female ‘prisoners’ go on until dawn.” Liberal historian Cartier laments: „It is an unfortunate but incontrovertible fact that the individuals who were plunging Germany and Bavaria into chaos were in the immense majority Jews.”

Another French historian, Benoist-Méchin, further specifies:

Mobs brandishing red flags... are trying to crush out the last spark of national instinct. But these mobs are not acting spontaneously. They are led by a legion of militants and agitators. And who are they? In Berlin: Liebknecht and Luxemburg; in Munich, Eisner, Lipp, Landauer, Toiler, Lewien, Levine and Axelrod; in Magdeburg, Brandeis; in Dresden, Lipinsky, Geyer and Fleissner; in the Ruhr, Markus and Levinsohn; in Bremerhaven and Kiel, Grünwald and Kohn; in the Palatinate, Lilienthal and Heine; in Latvia, Ulmanis. So many names, so many Jews.

Two other Jews, Hirsch and Heine, run Prussia; and three Jews in the Reichstag, Gothein, Kohn and Zinsheimer, move to bring Field Marshal von Hindenburg to trial. Walther Rathenau, another Jew, is foreign minister of Germany. Benoist-Méchin adds: „The list could be extended *ad infinitum*. How can one fail to see it as a true conspiracy?”

In the same period, in Hungary Bela Kun, a Central European Jew, set up another Soviet republic, in which 25 of his 32 ministers were Jewish.

A third French historian, Pierre Soisson, is no less explicit: „It must be noted that a great number of revolutionaries of the extreme left are Jews. This fact among others will weigh heavily on the destiny of the Jewish minorities in Germany between the two wars. For many Germans the Jews will be associated with Red terror, destruction and anarchy. The term Judeo-Bolshevik will be widely accepted, and it is reasonable to believe that the association derives from the memory of the Liebknechts, Luxemburgs, Zetkins and others.”

These facts are displeasing to some people. They also embarrass many Germans burdened since 1945 with the accusation of being exterminators of Jews. But recollection of the throes of 1918-1919 cannot be ignored if we mean to discover objectively the sources of German anti-Semitism.

Such anti-Jewish feelings, however, long predate the war. They hark back to a very old tradition that for centuries had virtually been the norm in all Western countries. Already in the 3rd century A.D. The Israelites, as they were then known, had been denounced by the Council of Granada. Stresemann himself as a student had been the spokesman of the Neo-Germania movement which before the war was highly critical, to say the least, of Jewish influence in Germany.

The sight of young German Jews comfortably sitting out the war, and the massacres perpetrated against German civilians by Jewish Communists, as well as the evidence that the Communist leaders were almost all Jewish, did little to endear the Jews to the Germans.

If the Germans did not much like Jewish ways before the war, they still had a policy of live and let live. But after the war Germans in the great majority were outraged by what they had seen and suffered. When Hitler denounced Jewish-Communist sabotage and massacres he was only echoing the people's outrage. There was not a single German family that had not suffered from atrocities caused by the Jews.

Even the most craven Weimar politicians denounced the Jewish Communists as alien vultures from the East clawing at a prostrate Germany. In 1920 the socialist interior minister received the following report-recorded in Dr. Schacht's memoirs – from the socialist police chief in Berlin regarding one of the suburbs of the capital:

This area is crawling with the foulest elements, presenting not just a criminal but a political danger, since they have brought with them from Poland and Russia their Bolshevist ideas which they are spreading here. They are also a menace to public health. The notion of cleanliness is completely alien to them. The houses where they live amid incredible crowding are full of filth and vermin. At the same time they are crammed with foodstuffs and delicacies of all kinds which they obtain by smuggling and in turn sell. Finally we note that the housing crisis the people are suffering, the people who pay taxes, will be intolerably aggravated by our taking in this host of aliens. It would be totally useless to show any consideration to people like that, whose activities are in no wise honorable, who pay no taxes, who elude all control but on the other hand take every opportunity to evade our German laws and do harm to our German heritage, indeed to destroy it.

Such official declarations would mobilize all the Jewish lobbies if they were uttered today, yet Dr. Schacht himself added this comment to the report „The immigration of Eastern Jews during those years was a matter of great concern.“ And he offered the following analysis: „The case of the Jews poses a problem that was subsequently to occupy first Germany, then the entire world: the roots of German

anti-Semitism.”

This from the same Dr. Schacht who remained the servant and confidant of Jewish moguls in Germany, England and America before, during and after Hitler.

Along with the political mess there was a corresponding moral mess. In addition to politics, the Jews had also taken over the entertainment industry.

„The plays of the Twenties,” Joachim Fest wrote, „dealt with the themes of patricide, incest, or crime and their provocative offerings were much applauded. In the final scene of the Brecht and Weill opera *Mahoganny*, the actors filed across the stage carrying placards with the slogans ‘to chaos in our cities,’ ‘free sex, – honor to murderers,’ or ‘immortality for scoundrels.’”

The Jewish-controlled press gave such plays and operas rave reviews, which had the effect of intimidating the bourgeoisie into trembling silence. As for the German workers, they were powerless to counteract anything of this nature.

Hitler, too, was powerless in the face of this Jewish invasion. The chaos, the Jewish massacres of innocent and defenseless Germans, the trampling of all values and standards, and the literal destruction of Germany. He saw it all.

Alone in the world, what could he do? His first public reaction revealed him to be just as courageous in civilian life as at the front. When Jewish commissars came to his Munich barracks to order the soldiers in the process of demobilization to join the Communist revolution, Hitler jumped onto a chair and shouted to all his fellow soldiers: „We’re not revolutionary guards responsible for protecting a rabble of Jewish idlers.”

The Jewish invasion of Germany and the Treaty of Versailles would from then on mobilize all of Hitler’s energy.

CHAPTER 5

A TREATY OF USURERS

On July 28, 1919 the Versailles Treaty fell like a bomb on 60 million Germans. It was meant to crush them to the last man. Stresemann compared how in 1871 a victorious Germany had dealt with a defeated France: „Germany, having won the war and occupying a part of France, was conscious of the necessity of mending relations between the two peoples.” French diplomat Saint Vallier officially praised the procedures of the German commander in chief. When French Ambassador Gontaut-Biron returned to Berlin, he was welcomed by the crown prince himself with the words, „The war is fortunately over and now peace must be maintained,” French President Thiers also declared that the German high command „deserved the sincere gratitude of France.” The French government had paid a relatively modest amount of money to Germany, and the war had been truly over.

The treaty of Versailles on the other hand would not be a treaty of intelligent victors, but a „*diktat* of despots.”

Historian Cartier summed it up: „In retrospect it is striking to contemplate this monument to ignorance and error. The treaty gave a chaotic and brutal Poland vast territories inhabited by Germans. It defied geography and politics by creating the Danzig corridor. It established a Czechoslovakia, a Romania, and a Yugoslavia bursting with minorities, all would-be states flouting Wilsonian principles. It left it to a commission to fix the amount of Allied claims but proclaimed the principle of total reparations based on article 231, by which Germany was to admit total guilt for starting the war. Article 228 demanded that Germany hand over all „war criminals,’ including the Kaiser and all the generals of the German army,”

The treaty was imposed by Allies who were by now totally disunited. The British, bloated with German assets after the defeat of Germany, were now more concerned with weakening France than with squeezing anything more out of Germany. And Wilson was embittered at seeing his points ignored. As for the French government, it was only in a vengeful treaty that it could justify the sending of millions of young men to their death. Yet most French historians condemned the treaty, including eminent historians Raymond Brizat and Pierre Soisson, the latter of whom concluded: „All the seeds of World War II are contained in the Versailles Treaty.”

After the debacle of France in 1870 there had been six months of discussions

between the French representative Jules Favre and the German Bismarck before a mutually approved treaty was reached. However, from January to May of 1919 the Germans were excluded from all discussions.

The Allies were at each other's throats, with the French politicians demanding nothing less than the extermination of Germany. Stresemann, who was ready to make any reasonable concession, could not hide his amazement at the hypocrisy of the Allies: „This international conference dealing with Germany's fate without German participation outrages all the principles for which these gentlemen claim they have gone to war against Germany.”

Thus Germany, excluded from the talks, had to suffer the loss of Alsace-Lorraine and all of its public and private assets within these provinces. Its Saar province, separated from Germany, would be robbed of its coal for fifteen years. The Rhineland would be occupied in its entirety. One and a half million Germans would be thrown under the Polish yoke, and another three million in the Sudetenland would come under Czech rule. German waterways, including the Kiel Canal, were placed under Allied control.

Yet the principle of self-determination was the very basis of the armistice of Nov. 11, 1918 under which Germany had agreed to lay down her arms. The treaty violated this solemn agreement. In East Prussia two plebiscites were held in districts coveted by Poland. The result was an overwhelming vote by the inhabitants to remain German. The Allies forced them into Polish rule anyway. Adding insult to injury, they not only lost their German citizenship but were still liable to pay reparations demanded by the Allies. Yet the near unanimity of the two Prussian plebiscites had alarmed the Allies, who then made sure that the Sudeten Germans would be thrown into the Czech pot without any say in the matter whatsoever. In Upper Silesia, after 18 months of armed Polish intervention and French pressure, a plebiscite was finally held, with a majority of 60 percent favoring Germany; but Upper Silesia was nonetheless delivered to Poland.

Austria, however, represented the most blatant violation. The great majority of Austrians wished to be reunited with Germany. The Austrian parliament, backed by national elections in favor of reunification, had solemnly supported unification with Germany. But this expression of the popular will was swept aside by the Treaty of Versailles, and the six million Austrians were refused any kind of plebiscite.

Cartier reported that when the Democratic Republic of Austria presented the first article of its new constitution, which declared Austria to be an integral part of the Republic of Germany, „the German government voted unanimously for Austria's admission into the Reich.” The treaty makers declared this popular vote null and void: self-determination applied only when it suited the victors.

Historian Soissons confirmed that „the Germans of Austria were prevented from uniting with their brothers in the Reich while at the same time three and a half million of them were forced into a completely fabricated Czechoslovakia under the rule of Czechs who were themselves a minority. Thus, German territories that were never conquered by a foreign army were distributed to peoples that were not even involved in the war, such as the Poles, the Danes, the Czechs and the Slovaks. Germans really felt that their country was being put on the rack.”

Versailles had become an auction block for the distribution of more than ten million unwilling people. A series of complementary treaties, St. Germain on Sept. 10, 1919 and Trianon on June 4, 1920, mutilated Hungary by forcing millions of Hungarians under Romanian rule and more than nine million non-Serbs under the rule of three million Serbs. Like slaves, none of these people had any say in their fate. Not only had a million and a half Germans been delivered into Polish bondage, but also millions of Ukrainians, Ruthenians, Byelorussians and others. Millions of Croats, Slovaks, Slovenians, Albanians, Bulgarians and Hungarians were thrown into the claws of their traditional enemies who persecuted and killed them. It was the policy of the Grand Orient government of France to encircle Germany with artificial states headed by fellow Grand Orient members in order to destroy Bavaria, Austria and Hungary that had been resisting the Grand Orient new world order.

The financial diktat was just as monstrous. The British, who had already helped themselves to German assets and colonies, encouraged the French to squeeze Germany for the last pfennig in order to keep them at each other's throats. That there was little more to squeeze out of Germany was well known by the British establishment. Lord Maynard Keynes, its economic policy adviser, accurately calculated that Germany would be hard put to pay even a tenth of what the Allies wanted. Keynes was quickly silenced on that issue, and the Treaty powers went on demanding chimerical sums from Germany. As a result, Germany would be further reduced to mins.

Added to this monument of inequity was the Allied insistence that the Germans accept the exclusive guilt for WWI. History has since amply demonstrated that the Pan-Slavs of St Petersburg and the crabby little lawyer president of France, M. Raymond Poincaré, were the ones primarily responsible for the war.

The treaty also mandated Germany to arrest more than 700 German generals and hand them over to the Allies for punishment.

Thus the Germans would be condemned to universal infamy and economic slavery for decades. Stresemann would later lament: „The Allies told us nothing but lies. We were insane to listen to them and to lay down our arms before concluding peace.”

The diktat outraged the general population, and the socialist prime minister, Scheideman, resigned on the grounds that „this treaty is unacceptable.“ Another socialist, Bauer, took his place but was unable to hold the anti-treaty coalition together. The centrist Erzberger capitulated to the diktat. It cost him his life ten months later when a young German patriot shot him dead „in retribution for his treason.“

Yet the Weimar government, fearing the people’s wrath, would not sign until the Allies threatened to invade Germany with three million troops. By then Germany had disarmed and would have faced certain defeat against a fully armed enemy, and after defeat still another dismemberment of what was left of Germany.

It was literally with a gun at its head that the German parliament finally signed, two hours before an Allied invasion. Stresemann, the peace seeker, had to admit: „A signature obtained by extortion is invalid. This tyrannical treaty heralds a new war.“

Such protestations were greeted with Allied hatred and contempt. Even months after ratification, German officials ordered to appear before the Allies to learn how they were to carry out the diktat were treated like galley slaves. Even Dr. Schacht, who prided himself on enjoying fraternal relations with the Grand Orient tyrants, was not spared. He recounts with what contempt the Germans were treated:

„I was heading a delegation of industrial experts to the Hague in order to deal with Allied demands for our potassium and other chemical products. The reception we received reminded me of Persian satraps receiving suppliants from a vanquished Athens. The most elementary courtesy was lacking. Our delegates had to stand during the talks because chairs had not been provided. I did not hide my anger at Allied rudeness, and my colleagues anxiously begged me not to complain. I did so, however, to the Allied presiding general: ‘We have been put in the worst hotels and miserably fed. We are not allowed to go out, and we are made to stand while taking part in the discussions. I ask you to put an end to this state of things.’ ‘You seem to forget that your country lost the war,’ the general coldly replied. And I returned to Berlin enlightened by the experience.“

The German people choked on such deceit and humiliation. Germany abounded in intellectuals, businessmen and high officials, but not a single one would challenge the status quo.

It was then that the unknown and Ione Corporal Hitler called on Germany to resist. His conquest of the people would be nothing short of a miracle. It would take him fourteen long years to reach and win over, one by one, the millions of voters, since the establishment and special interest groups were automatically against him.

On the other side of Europe, Lenin was gleefully watching all the events that

would lead to another fratricidal war in Europe. It fitted perfectly with his plans for world subversion: „A peace of usurers and executioners has been imposed on a Germany ravaged and dismembered.” For Lenin, this was not a tragedy but a great opportunity. This was a European civil war out of which Communism would emerge the sole victor.

Thus between the all-powerful Communist International, backed by high finance, and ex-corporal Hitler, backed by no one except the common people, the duel had begun.



In the late 1910s and 1920s, communists in Germany attempted a number of putschs, Under Eugene Levine, they seized power in Bavaria from 1918-1919, and this revolution became a model for similar uprising across Germany. In response, Hitler formed the SA out of former German soldiers, and put down the communist revolution that the German Republic couldn't control. Here Hitler is surrounded by young SA members.

CHAPTER 6

SEVEN AND A HALF MARKS

Hitler went to the Altes Rosenbad coffeehouse at Herrnstrasse, Number 45, the meeting place of the *Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (DAP). He had to cross a dark and silent hall before reaching a small adjoining room only dimly lighted by an oil lamp. Six committee members were present. The minutes of the previous meeting were read. Three letters had been received and duly answered. The treasurer then made his report. The party had seven and a half marks.

Hitler became the seventh member of the committee and the 508th party member, a somewhat pious exaggeration since to inflate the party a bit, the numbers started with 501. And even his name had once again been misspelled, and would so remain in various party documents, as Adolphe Hittler.

Hitler was not exactly carried away. As he recalled the meeting: „There was no plan for action. No leaflets. Not even membership cards. It was the mania for association in its most exasperating form.”

Yet it was from that dimly lit back room and that party worth seven and a half marks that the force would ultimately arise to rally and bind together the minority of the German people in just a few years.

But on this 16th of September 1919, Hitler realized he would have to breathe life into the pathetic little party.

He borrowed a typewriter from the barracks and personally typed the schedule for future meetings. There was not enough money to buy stamps, so he delivered the invitations door to door and distributed some to passersby. His name did not appear, as he did not want to alarm his fellow members, who were already concerned by his zeal.

Getting people to attend was hard work. Eleven came to the first meeting, 13 to the second, 17 to the third, 23 to the fourth, 34 to the fifth. But Hitler accepted this slow progression as normal. To him, true democracy was based on convincing people one by one. But he also realized that the tragic days Germany was going through made it urgent to reach as many people as he could. To this end he convinced the party to gather together enough money to buy space in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, a small patriotic newspaper. The advertisement called people to attend a meeting at the *Hofbäukeller* in Munich on Oct 16, 1919. Hitler was optimistic because

the Keller could accommodate more than 100 people.

Since his days at the front Hitler had known that only propaganda could seize the masses and carry them along. He did not regard propaganda in any pejorative way but in its original and still contemporary meaning, which was that of propagating or conveying anything of a spiritual nature. While the word was later debased by the Allies as meaning the spreading of lies, Hitler always regarded it as the spreading of truth. The highest Cabinet post in Hitler's government was the Ministry of Propaganda, headed by his most trusted lieutenant, Dr. Joseph Goebbels. Hitler's definition of the word was the same as that of the early Christians for whom propaganda meant only the spreading of the Gospel.

Thus, Hitler knew that the absolute propaganda was the absolute truth. It had to be repeated ceaselessly, and it could not compromise in any way with the lies of the enemy. The very notion of compromising good with evil was totally alien to Hitler. It was only the stock in trade of craven politicians which he instinctively rejected. He also knew that these politicians were distasteful to the masses and that they had been waiting a long time for someone they could believe in. They would never compromise with the enemy, and neither would he. For Hitler and the masses the truth was nonnegotiable, and he would uphold it against all and everything. Because Hitler was a rare combination of idealist and realist at the same time, he knew that propaganda had to be impressive, colorful, boisterous and entertaining as well as instructive.

He would meet his worst enemies on their own ground with his own patriotic followers waving the red flag. He knew red was a beautiful and energetic color which should not be monopolized by the Marxists. He would retake control of the streets from the Jewish-financed Communist thugs. He would create uniforms for the most patriotic Germans that would be honored by the population and flags that would symbolize the rebirth of Germany. He would establish his own press so that for the first time a German leader could communicate directly with his own people and not be dependent upon alien-controlled news media. Propaganda would be the powerful vanguard of a real popular revolution.

If Hitler had already worked out his program, he was still without any means to implement it. Unlike Lenin and Trotsky, who received millions from Jewish financiers, Hitler and his tiny party did not have anything. Imagination and personal work would just have to provide.

When Hitler was confronted with having to pay the rent of a room in a beer hall, the heating, the cost of leaflets, he realized he had to raise the funds from the very public that attended the meetings. Why shouldn't they pay to hear him when the worst journalist was getting paid? He felt confident he could entertain, educate,

arouse enthusiasm and inspire an audience better than an empty-headed actor. If he could not outperform the best of them, he believed he should forfeit the right to speak. Thus Hitler invented, by necessity and political instinct, the political meeting with a price of admission. A ticket was an investment the people made in the party, and the party would be beholden only to the people.

More than 100 people showed up at the *Hofbräukeller* on Oct. 16, 1919. The first speaker was Dr. Erich Kuelir. But it was not until Hitler took the stage that the audience came alive. Hitler won them over. He personally passed the collection plate: 300 marks. A Munich police report dated Oct. 17, 1919 stated: „He is a shopkeeper about to become a traveling salesman.” So much for the police intelligence division!

Hitler wrote: „I talked for 30 minutes. What I had previously felt as a possibility now appeared to be a reality. I was a gifted speaker.” But it was more than a gift. No man in history ever had such a genius for words and gestures and for communicating directly and so deeply with his audience. Half a century later the world is still waiting for his like. Hitler was to speech what Wagner was to music. Wagner was fortunate that the art of music is the first of arts. It transcends all conventions and borders. But speech is limited to those who can understand it. Hitler was conscious of this difference, and he would do all in his power to close the gap.

Three months after Hitler joined the D.A.P. many things had changed. The party moved to a bigger room below the *Stemekerbräu* breweiy. It had bought an old Adler typewriter, a desk, a few chairs and a cabinet for filing documents. The room was no longer lit by a gas lamp but by electricity. The rent was 50 marks per month, seven times more than the amount in the party treasury when Hitler joined.

By December 1919 the party's coffers were bulging with 3,600 marks, which allowed all bills to be paid with 700 marks still left over. Since this was all due to Hitler, the party named him director of propaganda. Hitler now had a mandate to move forward, and he did not wait. He took the 700 marks left in the party's cash box and rented the largest hall in Munich: the *Hofbräuhaus Festhall*, which was 10 times larger than any of the previous party meeting locations. It was a gamble. How could he fill such a hall? Enraging the Communists, he plastered Munich with his crimson red posters advertising the meeting and sent trucks decked with red flags and loudspeakers into the Munich streets. On the evening of Feb. 24, 1920 more than 2,000 people packed the *Hofbräuhaus*.

Hitler still declined to put himself forward. The posters he himself had written did not even mention his name. The featured speaker was a Johannes Dingfelder.

Dingfelder spoke on and on without attracting much reaction even from the

socialists and Communists who had come in great numbers.

Hitler followed as the second and unfeatured speaker. Quickly the *Hofbräuhaus* came alive with clapping from supporters and insults and flying beer mugs thrown at Hitler by the Communists and socialists. Fists flew.

Gradually the crowd became quiet as Hitler kept talking. Communists who had come to boo and disrupt were now hanging on Hitler's every word. Hitler was enunciating the famous 25 Points which would remain the granite foundation of National Socialism until April 30, 1945.

In themselves and in the context of the day, the points were not so extraordinary: German nationality reserved for citizens of Germanic blood – the idea was 50 years old. The death penalty for profiteers and usurers – a popular idea in those days of near famine. Promulgation of a Jewish statute – another popular idea. Profit sharing between workers and companies, old-age pensions, a popular army – all of which were widely supported. Other political parties were putting forth similar platforms.

What had captivated the audience was the orator. After each point the crowd jumped to their feet with a clamor. After two and a half hours Hitler was drenched as if he had fallen into a swimming pool. The crowd was delirious with enthusiasm. Hitler had totally won them over. Eckart, a famous Munich writer, was so overwhelmed that he gave his own overcoat to Hitler, saying to the crowd. "This man will liberate Germany." Another enthusiastic spectator repeated. "If anybody can one day shape Germany's destiny, it will be that man Hitler." His name was Julius Streicher.

Hitler made this curious remark: "A wolf has just been born." From then on, that word would follow Hitler wherever he went. Every Hitler headquarters would be marked with a wolf head or some other badge of the wolf, denoting a "wolf den" was inside.

The establishment press, as was to be expected, dismissed this momentous meeting with a few lines. "A certain Herr Hitler gave a reading afterwards of the party's program," the left-wing liberal *Münchener Post* wrote, "and Herr Hitler spoke rather like a comedian."



The *Hofbräuhaus* of Munich, built in 1589 as part of the Royal Brewery of Wilhelm V of Bavaria, was a central organizing and meeting hall for the early National Socialist German Workers Party. In this photo, snapped in 1929, Hitler meets with NSDAP leaders to plot political strategy in the wake of the devastating economic collapse.

One has to believe that the „comedian“ came off rather well, because in that same year, his audience reached a percentage of 30 percent workers, almost all of them won over from the socialist electorate.

As for the program of the 25 points, Hitler attached little importance to it. Some of the points, such as nationalizing the big department stores and agrarian land, would soon receive no further mention. But when Hitler came to power, the reforms he made in those areas had the full support of both merchants and farmers. He never allowed any of the points to divide the German people. Although they were never officially modified, no one made them an issue: People had approved the man rather than the points. He had earned public trust and devotion.

Hollywood caricaturing notwithstanding, Hitler had a cool and realistic mind. His own program was perfectly worked out in his head. But in 1920 it was still too early to spell it out in full. He despised the pompous and empty promises of politicians, and his program would break the cycle of broken promises. What he had in mind was to harness the talent and energies of all the classes, to completely transform the life of the German worker, and to triple the industrial output. Farmers would occupy a place of honor in the society. Jews would be excluded from public office. The territory of the Reich would be liberated, and the 10 million Germans exiled into alien bondage by the Versailles Treaty would be returned to the nation.

But Hitler had the realism to know that the revelation all at once of such plans and the considerable risks which they implied, would be ill-considered and

premature. It was sufficient for now that certain unshakable tenets of faith served as his Tables of the Law. Whatever was essential would spring forth from his mind and his will at the proper time.

Unlike other politicians on the political right, politicians who were at the moment far more celebrated than himself, he knew exactly what he wanted. And he now knew himself capable of doing what no one else could do. He was no longer just „a certain Herr Hitler,“ as he had been characterized in the press. He had become Hitler, the living presence, whom History would have to put up with whether or no.

CHAPTER 7

EIN FÜHRER

The *Hofbräuhaus* success would sever the last link holding Hitler to a military life. The army had given Hitler a bed, something to eat and a few marks a month. It was the only life he knew. But on April 2, 1920 he would take his leave and embark on a brand new life.

His demobilization entitled him to one pair of socks, a pair of underpants, a shirt, a pair of trousers, a coat and a pair of heavy shoes. He also received a bonus of 50 marks, hardly enough to buy food for two weeks.

He rented a small room, four meters by three, on the Thierschstrasse in Munich. It had only one window for light, and no heating. The furnishings consisted of a small iron bed, two chairs and a little table complete with a washbowl. Hitler would live there for years. Captain Truman Smith, the U.S. military attaché in Berlin, who came there and interviewed Hitler in order to inform his ambassador, had this to say: 'The room was poor and depressing beyond imagination. It looked like a back room in a New York slum? This report led the State Department to dismiss Hitler as a penniless and therefore inconsequential tramp.

François-Poncet, the French ambassador, was much more perceptive: It would be a mistake to think that this visionary was not realistic. He was very coldly realistic and very calculating. To serve his iron will he possessed formidable mental powers, an extraordinary perseverance, absolute fearlessness, the power to make sudden and ruthless decisions, a most penetrating glance, and an intuition that warned him of perils. He was in touch with his people as if by antennas."

After each meeting where he was cheered by the crowd, Hitler would return alone and silent to his freezing room at 41 Thierschstrasse. Material comfort was never and would never be a consideration for Hitler.

During the next few months following his statement of the 25 Points, Hitler organized and spoke at 46 meetings, all told addressing 62,371 people who paid to hear him. That was more than the combined attendance of all the left-wing parties.

As was to be expected, one of his speeches (on Aug. 13, 1920) was devoted to the Jewish problem. The posters read: „Why are we against the Jews?“ Hitler was adroit, and he did not answer the question with the violence of a Luther, who called the Israelites „a pestilence, a calamity, an epidemic, a curse for Christendom.“ „His

speech," historian John Toland relates, „was a marvel of propaganda. Hitler demonstrated that he was a genius in blending past and present events into a form calculated to inspire hatred and resentment. He was constantly interrupted by laughter and cries of approval. Eighteen times the audience burst into applause and the reaction was especially loud when he referred to the Jews as nomads.“

This speech was one of the rare ones to have been preserved in its entirety. Cartier, the historian, who possessed a copy of the complete text in shorthand, commented: „Hitler's theme was work and the Jews. His approach to the question was harsh in the extreme, but it is true that the text, when read, is that of a lecturer, not a rabble-rouser. Hitler had obviously prepared his speech very carefully and probably learned it by heart, which with his peerless memory was mere child's play. The reaction of the audience showed that Hitler's presence and oratory gave the text life, holding the audience's attention and kindling their passion. For the first 20 minutes the audience was rather subdued, but thereafter the demonstrations became more and more frequent and enthusiastic. Hitler had gotten their attention. He brought the house down with laughter 11 times, dispensing sarcasm and irony with the art of a consummate actor. He commanded thunderous applause and finished his speech to a prolonged standing ovation.“

In his peroration, Hitler had addressed not just his German audience but all other peoples as well: „People of the world, unite and resist the Jews. People of Europe, free yourselves from the Jewish yoke.“

It was the call for a crusade: a crusade, however, that was strictly limited to the *Entfernung* („removal“) of the Jews that Hitler had already spoken of in his report to the Reichswehr in 1919. Hitler's solution was to remove the Jews from the levers of power in Germany and thus keep them from dominating the destiny of the Germans. This was not a new concept. For more than a thousand years Europeans had sought to keep the Jews from dominating their various countries. Hitler would never tolerate the control of Germany by non-German aliens, and if the Jews did not like a Germany for the Germans they simply could leave. This was the gist and sum total of Hitler's famous speech of Aug. 13, 1920 on how to deal with the Jewish problem, nothing further than that.

However, thanks to post WWII propaganda, the word *Entfernung* was deliberately mistranslated in the myriad anti-German books as meaning „liquidation“ or „annihilation.“ British books were the first to produce this fabricated meaning which was then translated into French and all other languages. Ironically, these propaganda books were then translated into German, so that Germans would have to read a total mistranslation of a German word as gospel. Since draconian „anti-Nazi“ laws imposed by the Allies after WWII make it a crime to quote „Nazi“ writings, it has not been possible to rectify publicly the mistranslation.

Thus the „final solution“ so often quoted from Hitler’s 1920 speech has been one more hoax perpetrated on the public by political „historians.“ Unlike Hitler, who wished only for the Jews to go away, the average German in 1920 felt much less kindly.

Hitler’s moderation was in marked contrast to the popular wrath of the time, and it is an irony of history that it was this moderation that was used in attempts to discredit Hitler in the eyes of the German people as being himself a Jew.

This thesis was taken up in hundreds of books by Jewish and non- Jewish writers. On Oct. 14, 1933 the British *Daily Mirror*, owned by Jewish press magnate Lord Beaverbrook, published the photograph of a Jewish tombstone of one Ayralliam Eyliyohn, a Bucharest Jew whom the *Minor* claimed to be Hitler’s grandfather. This claim received wide acceptance throughout the English-speaking world and had to wait for historian Werner Maser to expose it as an absurdity: Eyliyohn’s birth certificate preceded by five years the birth certificate of Hitler’s father!

Then, a „confession“ was wrenched from the tortured Nuremberg prisoner Hans Frank that a Jew had made Hitler’s grandmother pregnant. An American officer by the name of Sixtus O’Connor was the recipient of this amazing confession, which named the Jew in question as a certain Frankeireither from Graz in Austria

This assertion was supposedly corroborated by an article written by some distant relative of Hitler’s and published in the Aug. 5, 1939 edition of *Paris Soir*. Again Maser pointed out that neither the name Frankeireither nor the name Frankenberger, as it had also been quoted, appeared in any records of Graz. Furthermore, not a single Jew had lived in Graz from the time of the fifteenth century until ten years after the death of Hitler’s grandmother. When Maser then checked the *Paris Soir* article, he was surprised to find that the name Frankereither or Frankenberger was never mentioned. Thus another piece of Nuremberg „evidence“ was based on torture and fabrication.

Another fantasy swallowed by the Allies was Hitler’s alleged destruction of Dollersheim, an Austrian village that was his father’s birthplace. This charge came from a defrocked priest called Jetzinger, who claimed that in 1937 Hitler had ordered the village destroyed because there were compromising records there pertaining to his origins.

„Dollersheim and the neighboring villages no longer exist,“ Jetzinger wrote. „The whole region once fertile and thriving is nothing but desolation now. Death lies in wait for you everywhere in the shape of unexploded bombs. The former villagers have been dispersed throughout the country. For some years Hitler had savored his triumph in having blown up and bulldozed flat his father’s birthplace and his

grandmother's grave ... Everything indicates that Dollersheim's death sentence came from Hitler himself and was inspired by his implacable hatred of his father whose own father may have been Jewish."

It made good Freudian copy, but again it was a fabrication. Historian Maser set the record straight: „Jetzinger's statements are patently absurd. After the Anschluss, a commemorative stone was placed near the tomb of Maria Anna Schicklgruber, engraved with across and the words: 'Here lies the Führer's grandmother, Maria A. Hitler, born Schicklgruber.' Schoolchildren and members of the Hitler Youth would often come there to pay their respect, and the grave was always very well maintained."

Just before WWII the Wehrmacht set up a training field in the region. A few isolated farmhouses were slightly damaged, but none of the church and government records was ever destroyed, nor was the village of Dollersheim. The destruction of the entire Dollersheim region occurred between 1945 and 1955 and was brought about by the Soviet occupation forces, a fact known but unpublicized by Establishment historians. All the fabrications about Hitler from self-hating Jew and Jew-hating gentile to enraged and hysterical loudmouth were false.

Werner Maser was amazed at the meticulous care with which Hitler prepared everything he did. All his writings were based on a wide range of accurate notes: „The 250 pages of notes which Hitler wrote by hand in preparation of his speeches at the beginning of his career reveal that he had a prodigious memory, with a wealth of material at his disposal, and that he was fully cognizant of his conclusion when he drafted the first line of his statement A few names, brief sentences or images on a piece of paper were all he required to develop his argument. Whenever his eyes fell on one of these words, an automatic process was triggered and he would speak, always knowing what names, figures, facts, details, images, ideas, examples, or figures of speech to rely on.“

It was not, however, just the genius of his oratory that assured his victory, but his education, his profound and meticulous preparation, and the incisive clarity of his world view.

No one else in Germany had such an all-encompassing mind and matchless ability to express it.

The Weimar Assembly was not lacking in good people. Every parliament on earth abounds in rhetoricians, some pretentious, some ambitious, some greedy and corrupt, but some also honest agents of the people, and some even of keen intelligence. And weak or brilliant, they are not necessarily bad. It is the parliamentary system which is a failure: a democracy of 500 men, none of whom can

truly make use of his gifts or exercise any authority. The system is geared to level all to a common denominator of mediocrity for the benefit of often hidden manipulators and bosses. It is a faceless system in which no one is ever held responsible, and the people's interest is always betrayed. Should anyone with the slightest individuality and character emerge, he will as a matter of course be sabotaged by the backstabbers and trampled by the herd. Stresemann was such a man. In 1923 he was defeated five times. Nothing serious can be accomplished that way, above all when a country is in a state of decline.

Hitler was hated not for his failings but for his qualities. No country can survive the betrayal of its people by the mediocre and the manipulative. Real democracy relies on the trust people place in a true leader not to betray their interest. And only such a leader with the unswerving support of the people is truly able to rally the most competent to serve the people. Competence is anathema to the democracy of the mediocre.

The Weimar republic was such a democracy, and for Germany it meant suicide.

In March of 1921 the Weimar politicians fled from Berlin to Stuttgart following a coup financed by Trebitch Lincoln, an alien Jew, with the complicity of Baron von Luttwitz and Gen. von Seeckt, head of the Reichswehr. A half-Jew, Wolfgang Kapp, was the nominal leader of the putsch, but Tiebitch Lincoln was the real chief of operations. The only man in the government not to be intimidated was Cabinet Minister Noske.

On March 12, 1921 Noske confronted von Seeckt and the officer corps with these words: „All the officers who are ready to follow me, raise your hands.“ Only two complied. Von Seeckt said: „The Reichswehr does not shoot at the Reichswehr.“

Hitler had gone to Berlin to assess the situation for himself. He noted how a parliament of sheep had been thrown into chaos by a couple of Jewish manipulators. Yet discredited as it was for signing the Versailles Diktat, the government still had the bureaucracy at its disposal, which enabled it to suppress nationalist opposition; but at the same time it was too craven to build up a strong Germany. All the government's police, agencies and repressive laws were aimed at the suppression of populism and nationalism. Sixty million Germans were thus held at bay by their own, but alien-run, government, while Hitler's supporters numbered only 3,000.

It would take Hitler 12 years of struggle, always against the stream, against continual obstacles, to reach the remaining 60 million Germans. But he never had the slightest doubt that he would reach his goal.

Germany's condition was becoming more and more catastrophic. Her province

of Upper Silesia had been handed over to Poland and along with it a major part of her steel and coal. In the Rhineland the Grand Orient French government was openly fomenting subversion and sedition. Economically, the German mark was spiraling downwards. German cries for help were answered only with renewed demands by the Allies, best illustrated by the peremptory words of the Jewish finance minister of France, M. Klotz: „The Germans will pay.”

The Allies demanded that Germany give them 2 million tons of coal every month. Failure to comply would result in the invasion of Germany. Then there was the incredible demand for payment to the Allies of 226 billion gold marks over a period of 42 years, with interest, an astronomical amount impossible to pay. Then there was a 12 percent tax directly payable to the Allies on all German exports, another impossibility since Germany had already been bled white. The German government gave everything it could, but the Allies protested that the payments were short.

Poincaré, then head of the French government, manifested his displeasure by sending Allied troops into Germany every time German payments were late or insufficient: into Frankfurt and Darmstadt in 1920; into Dusseldorf in 1921; and finally, in January of 1923, he invaded the Ruhr province with French and Belgian troops.

All this was a boon for the Communists. The Allied exactions were making things easy for them. What with the Allied looting and the German government coming apart, Communist subversion had again become as much a problem as in 1918.

Hitler was well aware that between the red revolution backed to the hilt by Moscow and his own few thousand faithful supporters, the odds, in the normal course of events, were most unequal. He bluntly told his followers: „Whoever fights on our side will win no laurels, much less material rewards. He will most likely end up in prison.”

Many, in fact, would fare worse. Hitler’s long struggle would cost the lives of 1,785 of his faithful followers and see 43,000 of them wounded at the hands of the Communists.

But it was Hitler’s courage and the sacrifice of the people who joined him that impressed the common folk of Germany. Hitler never lost an opportunity to remind the crowd: „These knights, these counts, these generals will never do anything. But I will, and I alone!” It was not said vaingloriously but simply as a statement of fact which he would increasingly demonstrate.

The bourgeois parties had decided to protest the Allied demand for 269 billion gold marks, but when they heard that the Communists would disrupt their protest, they ran for cover. This cowardice so outraged Hitler that he decided to organize the protest all by himself. It was Feb. 2, 1921. Hitler decided to rent the huge hall of the Krone Circus in Munich for a meeting. To advertise the meeting, he had thousands of posters printed, more blood-red than ever, just to enrage the Marxists, and he flooded the workers' districts with flyers. Again he sent out his zealous supporters in trucks, brandishing flags – flags for the first time displaying the swastika.

Hitler had designed the flags himself, revived from Germany's ancient past. He had worked on the design for several nights, refining its dimensions and proportions to the millimeter. He had strengthened the cross by turning its curved extremities into sharp right angles to emphasize its symbolizing of life and energy and inserted it within the black, white and red colors of the old flag of the German empire. Twenty years later the *Hakenkreuz* would fly from Narvik to Stalingrad.

On Feb. 2, 1921 it was still an unknown flag. Yet from the very first it alarmed the authorities, and it was decreed by the Bavarian minister of the interior that in future the police would be justified in using force to prevent the display of the emblem in public. Twelve years later the selfsame minister would hasten to fly from his balcony the very flag he had outlawed.

The hall of the Krone Circus was filled to capacity on the night of the meeting. More than 7,000 persons showed up, all paying their admittance fees to swell the party's coffers. Hitler himself was astounded. He spoke for two and a half hours. „From the first half hour I was interrupted by constant applause. At the end of two hours the applause gave way to an almost religious silence. When I uttered the last words, a wave of enthusiasm engulfed the audience, and they sang with fervor *Deutschland über alles.*“

So-called political experts, who to this day have never been able to understand the chemistry between a people and its leader, were then as now grasping to explain what was to them inexplicable. The Jewish historian Haffner attributed Hitler's success to hypnosis: „It was a hypnotic faculty such as enables a concentrated force of willpower to take possession of a collective unconscious at any time and in any circumstances. This hypnotic effect on the masses was Hitler's paramount political asset“.

Haffner did not credit Hitler with any other talent or the German people with a mind or will of their own. Events would later force Haffner to revise his evaluation: „One thing nevertheless besides the power of his oratory might have struck the observers and critics of Hitler even before 1933 if they had looked a little closer: his talent as an organizer, or more accurately his faculty for getting hold of men who are

efficient instruments of power and gaining mastery over them.”

After the success of the Krone Circus meeting Hitler would hold an average of four meetings a month. In excess of 60,000 marks were raised after expenses had been paid. In addition, party members paid fifty pfennigs per month, or six marks per year. Multiplied by thousands, that represented an important contribution to the new movement.

Hitler's successes, however, soon gave rise to jealousy. The party's original founders felt overtaken by events and were critical of what they called „Hitler's follies.“ The saturation propaganda used on Munich left them aghast such a waste of money! Somehow they had forgotten that when Hitler joined the party there had been only seven and a half marks in the treasury. They felt humiliated by his success and somehow wanted to bring him down to their own level of mediocrity. In order to lessen his influence they wanted to merge the party with other little parties that were vegetating just as they had been before Hitler's arrival. But for Hitler, the merging of weak and mediocre parties would never add up to any real force, and he always opposed such ideas. He knew he had the gift of inspiring the masses and helping them to become a real force, and he had no time to spend with lackluster politicians. He believed that once people had chosen a leader, they had a right to expect him to be responsible for everything without any buck-passing, and he had the right to expect unconditional support from the people. He believed that throughout his life.

Thus, the petty men of the original DAP planned to bring Hitler down to size: another episode in the eternal war between the mediocre and the talented. Hitler had gone to Berlin for six weeks on a talking tour and for high level meetings with Gen. Ludendorff, Grand Adm. Schroeder, Ernst von Borsig, a steel industry president, and the Count von Reventlow. The count's wife, French-born Countess d'Allemon, was full of admiration for Hitler and told all the guests of her elegant salon: „This man is the future messiah of Germany.“

While Hitler was gathering influential support for the party, he learned of the petty scheming going on in Munich. He quickly returned to face the party bureaucrats. Instead of receiving explanations he found himself being questioned in a hostile manner. How little they knew Hitler! He immediately resigned from the party.

The charges against Hitler were as absurd as they were false. Besides being denounced for being power mad, he was accused of being a womanizer, and, what's more, with women who wore costly silk pants and smoked cigarettes. Poor Hitler! All the while living like a monk in his freezing room.

Meanwhile, the rank and file members were refusing to accept Hitler's resignation, and he was invited to speak on July 11, 1921. Strong in the knowledge that without him the party was nothing anyway, he gave the party an ultimatum: if they wanted him to stay, all the whining schemers would have to resign; all the nay-sayers, obstructionists, and envious mediocrities would have to go; and the party would have to recognize him at once as president with full executive powers. The petty schemers were shocked and suddenly realized they had taken on a very unusual opponent Drexler, one of the main schemers, threw himself at Hitler's feet „In recognition of your vast knowledge and your selfless work for the betterment of the party, as well as your exceptional eloquence, the committee is ready to grant you full executive powers and to name you president as soon as you rejoin the party.“

But Hitler did not accept, and without asking the committee that had already eaten its humble pie, he made a direct appeal on July 29, 1921 to the party rank and file. Hitler wanted power from the people, not from a handful of petty schemers. His arrival at the meeting was met with thunderous applause. Hitler's conditions were put to a vote: 553 for and one against.

Later, at a huge rally at the Krone Circus, all the conditions were officially ratified. Hitler had become master of his house by a virtually unanimous vote and by the will of the people. It was on that night that for the first time he became the Führer. The magic word had been launched.

CHAPTER 8

HITLER'S THREE CHANCES

So many plans were going through my head. I thought for days of what I could do, but everything came down to the fact that I did not have a name and therefore did not have the power to perform any useful action." This had been Hitler's frame of mind up to the day the Versailles treaty was signed. He had less than one hundred marks in his pocket, knew hardly anyone in Munich, could not rely on support from anyone, and it would take another two years before his name would even be spelled correctly.

Establishment media and historians have always stated that Hitler did not have a program. More importantly he had principles. Programs must be adapted to the trend of the day, but principles retain their direction and integrity. Programs which are not based on principles are like clay without a sculptor.

During the lonely years in Vienna and for 51 months at the front, Hitler had been part of the rhythm of a whole people and had felt its spiritual strength, like a minuscule star in an immense constellation. The higher principles spiritually guiding him represented for Hitler the only reality. In Berlin he told me that great men are imbued with a spirituality which allows them to raise humanity from mediocrity and bondage.

Bereft of any material means, Hitler had only his faith and his principles. But even unknown to himself, Hitler had the gift of the word. It was a gift of God. The greatest minds may stammer at the mere reading of a page or two in public. Germany especially had always lacked orators. Even the Weimar politicians were stiff and uninspired in their public speeches. It was then that Hitler recalled the spark in the expressions of his fellow soldiers when he spoke to them in the trenches. Why did they hang on his every word and listen to him, a nobody, while they dismissed with contempt the mouthing of the high and mighty?

At the beginning of 1919 what was left of the German army was the country's last rampart against Communist insurrection. With great difficulty demobilized men and officers managed to save Berlin and several other German cities. But the price was high when the Communists captured them: they were tortured abominably before being murdered. The patriots were also attacked by certain former Russian-held war prisoners who had been brainwashed by Marxist commissars before being sent back to Germany.

The patriotic soldiers organized to win back these brainwashed Germans. They started a campaign to restore national and civic principles to all who had served in the armed forces. But to implement the campaign they needed to train trusted patriots from the non-commissioned ranks in a special course at the Munich University. Among them was Hitler, whose patriotism and anticommunism had been noted. But he was still an obscure ex-soldier.

A few days into the program, Professor Karl Alexander von Mueller, who was teaching a course on the political history of the war, addressed the officer who had sent him the little group of enlisted students, Captain Karl Mayr, and asked him, „Did you know you had an orator of talent among your trainees?“

„Who is he?“

„A certain Hitler from the List Regiment,“ replied von Mueller. The professor had discovered Hitler’s talent completely by chance: „After my lecture, which had created a lively discussion, and when I was about to leave the room, I bumped into a small group of men blocking the exit who appeared fascinated by the words of a man with a strangely guttural voice... I was struck by his pale face, the unmilitary lock of black hair across his forehead, his small brush of a mustache, and his large light blue eyes shining with a formidable intensity. As I observed his listeners, I had the impression that their exaltation which he had inspired was coming back to him like a boomerang, giving greater strength to his impassioned voice.“

Well, Captain Mayr was not an ordinary officer, he was one of the prime movers of the propaganda and instruction section of the military command. And he acted immediately on von Mueller’s evaluation. He assigned Hitler to a Munich regiment as „confidential agent of the Regional Military Command.“

It was not Hitler’s ideas that earned this unexpected promotion but, as Mayr put it, „the very beautiful, clear and incisive form he gave his words.“ Mayr saw in Hitler a brave and patriotic soldier capable of winning back the soldiers who had been brainwashed by their Communist captors. So he was sent to the Lechfeld camp, which had a lot of them. Within a month he had turned the camp around politically. Lt. Bendt, Hitler’s commanding officer, sent his report to Munich:

„He makes his ideas accessible to all with great clarity and simplicity. He is a born popular orator who, by his passionate zeal and because he acts like one of their own, captures people’s attention and wins them over to his way of thinking.“

Thus Hitler the orator was discovered as the result of luck. His success at Lechfeld finally gave him a name and some well deserved recognition. He was no longer an anonymous corporal among 400,000 others. Now he would receive a letter

written by his superior Captain Mayr on Sept. 10, 1919 beginning with the particularly ceremonial expression, „Sehr verehrter Herr Hitler.“ For one who had known the rigor of subordination in the German army, such a change was hardly believable.

One aspect of Hitler’s success at Lechfeld in particular caught the attention of his superiors: the correlation he established between the Communist revolution in Germany and the constant presence of Jews at the head of the subversion. The chief of army intelligence and education asked Hitler to write a report on the influence of the Jews and Judaism.

Hitler’s report was quite revolutionary. He acknowledged that most people were physically repulsed by Jewish characteristics, but saw this repulsion as instinctive, while his own was strictly intellectual. On the basis of logical analysis he concluded that for the last 2,000 years the Jews had maintained an intangible race which set them apart from any national community in which they happened to find themselves. Thus Hitler’s first political document was a military report:

If it is true that the danger Judaism poses for the German people is expressed in the repugnance which Jews trigger in a large part of our people, this repugnance is generally not based on knowledge of the pernicious influence of Judaism on our nation, but on emotions. This is a grave error. Defense against Judaism must not and cannot be based on emotional reactions but on knowledge of the facts. In the first place, Judaism is a race, not a religious community. Jews never designate themselves as Germans, Poles, or Americans of the Jewish faith, but always as German Jews, Polish, or American Jews. Language is the only thing Jews borrow from foreign nations. Jews do not have to belong to the Judaic faith to be Jewish. Throughout the centuries Jews have kept their own racial characteristics within a most restrictive consanguineous circle with greater strength than many of the peoples among whom they live. Thus an alien non-German race lives among us. It has neither the inclination nor the power to renounce its racial traits or its way of feeling, thinking and acting, and yet this alien race has the same rights as ourselves.

Hitler concluded that emotional reactions led to pogroms, whereas a rational reaction would lead to the systematic and legal abolition of the special privileges enjoyed by the Jews. Other resident aliens did not have such benefits, and Jews could not be a privileged alien race within the German nation. But the ultimate objective was to distance the Jews from the German people. The word „distance“ is noteworthy. Until his death Hitler would talk of „distancing“ the Jews from the German population. The word „extermination“ would never appear in any of his writings.

Arbeiter Partei (DAP). The founder was a railway locksmith called Anton Drexler. His basic idea was that the salvation of Germany lay in the reconciliation of socialism with nationalism. It was an original concept since the two had always been mortal enemies.

Since his Vienna days Hitler had known that these so-called enemies were in fact complementary. Drexler, the locksmith, was intensely patriotic as well as an ardent advocate of the social justice that in those days was called socialism. This patriotic „socialism‘ was indeed the mortal enemy of the perverted socialism run by Jewish financiers and their Marxist murderers. Thus the father of National Socialism was an honest and patriotic working man who, with his workshop comrades, formed their small party on Jan. 5, 1919. It was a true worker’s party, not a tool of international finance or of Jewish intellectuals.

From time to time the D.A.P. met in a room on the first floor of the Altes Rosenbad beer hall and invited Munich citizens to attend. A few people came out of curiosity.

Captain Mayr decided to send an observer to the next D.A.P. meeting. After his discovery by Professor von Mueller and his exploit in the Lechfeld camp, this was Hitler’s third stroke of luck. This time the meeting was being held in the back room of the Stemecker beer hall, and the guest speaker was to be Gottfried Feder, an economist. The meeting was attended by 45 people, among who were two shopkeepers, 16 tradesmen, an artist, a professor, and a judge’s daughter. Hitler wrote in his notebook after listening to the guest speaker: „Ridiculous hairsplitting pettiness. I’ve heard enough!“ As he was leaving, the professor, whose name was Baumann, asked to rebut the speaker’s boring speech.

He stood up and launched a tirade in favor of Bavarian separatism. That was too much for Hitler and although he was there only as an observer, he jumped on the podium and vehemently refuted the professor’s argument. His eloquence and the power of his arguments stunned the entire assembly with admiration. Hitler himself was stunned with what had just happened. This time he was not addressing soldiers but 45 civilians who, unlike in the army, were not bound by a common discipline.

On that evening he felt the strength of his word. He could capture people’s attention, and he could convince them. He felt not only the strength of his argument but that of a great energy exchange between orator and audience. He witnessed how the power of his oratory gave power to those who listened, and how in turn they returned more to him.

Thus on this Dec. 17, 1919 Hitler had conquered by his word alone. Hitler had discovered himself, and 45 people had undergone a transcendent spiritual

experience.

On that night, when Hitler returned to his barracks, he was troubled by the revelation of his eloquence and could not sleep. Upon his return he had pulled out of his pocket the small brochure Anton Drexler had given him, and at dawn, while throwing crumbs of bread to the mice he was in the habit of feeding each day, he undertook to read it. Basically it expounded the essential idea that was the point of departure of his own doctrine: the bringing together of the classes. But the style and presentation were poor, and the text had little impact.

The next day Hitler had set aside the meeting and had no thought whatever that it would lead to anything further. His audience, on the other hand, was still spellbound and wanted him back.

They wanted him to become a member and invited him to a committee meeting. A mechanic had told Drexler: „That man really can speak. We certainly could use him.”

For Hitler, the matter was not that simple. First, he was not a man „who could be used.” His instinct had always told him that he was predestined to lead. Then the party had appeared to him to be of ridiculously slight importance; and apart from the idea of the reconciliation of the classes, its program was *petit bourgeois* in spirit. There was talk of a „table full of good food” being one of the keys to happiness, and for Hitler that was not very edifying.

Hitler told me that Drexler had however conceived a capital idea for the salvation of Germany which was in agreement with the fundamental principle of his own vision of the reconciliation of the nation with socialism. Combining patriotism with social justice was an idea that for Hitler would be the driving force behind all his future political activity.

For two days Hitler hesitated. Finally he reasoned that even though his audience would be small in number, he himself was all alone. Forty-five people were almost nothing, but it was 45 times more than him. The DAP was minuscule, but it was there, and it had a name, and it was better to start from there than from zero.

„I concluded that I had to take the step. It was the definitive resolution of my life. There could not be any going back,” Hitler recalled in regard to this fateful decision.



A young woman burns worthless German marks in a furnace during the era of the Weimar Republic. Some people used marks as wallpaper for their homes; other photos show German children using bundles of Weimar-era money as toys instead of wooden blocks. Millions of Germans were homeless and destitute, but in a few short years after taking power, Adolf Hitler had reversed the entire situation.

CHAPTER 9

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE PARTIES

The deputies of the Weimar Republic had themselves voted to relinquish their power, and Hitler, in his brown shirt, completely poised and standing there before them in their own parliamentary chamber, had not spared them. „Well, gentlemen, it is up to you to decide whether it is to be peace or war “. But how could they take up the fight again now when they had really quit fighting years ago.

Hitler had not been willing even to let the last recalcitrant deputies, the Socialists – reduced at the time of the vote to a mere 17,55 percent of the nation’s representatives – assume the martyred pose of a persecuted fringe group.

„You speak of persecution!“ he thundered. „I think that few indeed are those in our party who have not suffered imprisonment and organized persecution at your hands. You seem to have totally forgotten the years when you used to rip off our shirts because the color didn’t suit you. It is your persecutions that have made us what we are!“

„In those days,“ he said scathingly, „you constantly banned our newspapers and prohibited our meetings. For years you did that, and now you say that criticism is salutary! You’re a bit late.“

The shoe was now on the other foot.

„We National Socialists mean from here on to clear the way for the German workingman. We shall be his spokesmen. As for you gentlemen, you are no longer needed. And do not confuse us with the bourgeois world. Do you flunk that your star may shine again? Well, gentlemen, Germany’s star will shine, and yours is going out In the life of a people, that which is rotten, old and weak disappears and does not return.“ (Fest, *op.cit.*, vol. 1, pp.35-37).

Hitler treated these bankrupt socialists as having no further interest to him „I can tell you only one thing: I do not want your votes! Germany must become free, but not by your doing.“

In the space of only half a year, Hitler would liquidate all these now forfeit political parties. Not just the Socialist Party, already rejected by the people themselves, but all the maneuvering politicians of all the other parties as well: the

Conservatives a century behind the times, the myopic Nationalists, the Christian braggarts – fomenters and agents all of them in Germany's rush to ruin from 1919 to 1933.

All of these parties without exception had long since lost their drive. If some of their members were still voting for them at the beginning of 1933, even under Hitler, it was just due to habit. The impetus was gone. The parties had botched everything, let everything go to ruin. Germany's collapse, her six million unemployed, the famine, the demoralization of an entire people, that was their doing. Now that a strong man who was supported by the nation had taken their place, what could they do? As Joachim Fest would write, they were „like a spiderweb with which one hoped to catch eagles.”

Hitler was ready to spare their feelings to some extent, but it was also certain that he wouldn't mind it too much if he had to step on the toes of recalcitrant politicians.

He said to the distinguished deputies of the Reichstag: „You consider me a man without education, a barbarian. And yes, we are barbarians! We mean to be. It's an honorary title. We are the ones who will rejuvenate the world.” (Fest, *op.cit.*, Vol. 1, pp. 35-37).

Hitler's millions of followers had rediscovered the original strength of rough primitive men of a time when human beings still had some backbone. It was a Dionysian power they would be able to reserve entirely for the tasks of the future. They would not even have to use it to liquidate the political parties. A mere shrug of the shoulder, and they would fall apart.

As was fitting, the first to crumble into dust was the Socialist Party, the „Social Democrats.”

Their end was totally lacking in panache.

On March 23, 1933 their party had still shown a bit of guts by refusing to vote Hitler plenary powers. After 1945 the party would glory in that deed, while at the same time taking care not to add that less than two months later, on May 17, 1933, when Hitler called for a new vote by the Reichstag to approve or disapprove of his foreign policy, the socialists did not vote „no” or abstain from voting; they voted „yes.” It was as if they felt themselves submerged by the wave of Hitler's popularity and by the massive support for Hitler within their own ranks; and they voted „yes,” just like the deputies of the National Socialist Party.

Goering, from the height of his presidential perch, measured the turncoats with

his glance and sneered: „The world has witnessed that the German people are in agreement when it is a matter of their destiny.”

In 1933 that destiny was Hitler.

After that, the socialist rank and file could hardly think of opposing Hitler when their leaders, who for so long had abused him and railed against him, were now behind him and voting for him in the Reichstag.

That day was the beginning of the end for the Reds. Following the example of their own party leaders, at the first political shift, the socialist electorate, too, would vote for Hitler.

Over the years the German Social Democrats had left labor in the lurch. Now they had just turned their red coats, had gone over to Hitler. For the people, that was the end, the public avowal of abdication.

It was child's play for Hitler to liquidate the party, for after its deliberate capitulation it was no longer of any interest to its ex-members. On June 22, 1933, 30 days after the vote of the Reichstag, it was officially dissolved.

„No one,” Fest wrote, „expected any show of resistance on the part of the SPD.”

It could have changed its initials to RIP: *resquiescat in pace*.

The peace would be total. Apart from a few leftist members of the parliament who went into exile and led stifled and useless lives abroad, the German socialist ex-deputies continued every month to pocket the pensions that Hitler had allowed them without batting an eyelid. They continued to promenade the streets of Berlin. Some of them, with great success, threw in their lot with the Nazis.

Nostke, the most valiant fighter the socialist party had after 1918, the lumberjack who became a minister, honestly acknowledged in 1944, when the Third Reich was already rapidly breaking down, that the great majority of the German people still remained true to Hitler because of the social renewal he had brought to the working class.

After the „Reds,” the „Whites.” had their turn.

A number of microscopic parties – of the two dozen some parties extant in 1932 – went ahead and liquidated themselves without anyone even marking the decease. They had been created only to allow one or another man of ambition to slither his way into the privileged ranks of the deputies. But without any deputy seats in sight,

what purpose would it have served to go on recruiting voters? So they had disappeared like the birds of the forest that go to the no one knows where.

The parties of the right, formerly important but whose voters had left them behind, were conscious of the futility of expending effort or money to keep political organizations artificially alive when their supporters had deserted them; and so one after another they, too, had voluntarily disbanded.

The „German National Populist Party,” abandoned by its bourgeois supporters, was the first to give up the ghost. A few days later, on June 28, 1933, the „State Party” did the same. Then, on July 4, the „Bavarian Popular Party’.”

Among all the mossbacked conservatives, the most difficult to get rid of was Hugenberg, who was still a minister and whom the Nazis rather disrespectfully called „the old porker in the beet patch.” He ultimately lost his beets while trying to play the superzealous Hitlerite at the London Conference, making a claim unreasonably soon for the restitution to Germany of all her colonies and calling for the absorption of the Ukraine in a newly constituted Reich! In Hitler’s view, that was totally inopportune in those first months when he was making a tremendous effort to curry favor abroad and calm things down. After that diplomatic blunder Hugenberg had no choice but to resign. So much for the man who, on Jan. 30, 1933, had sworn he would muzzle Hitler.

In getting rid of him, Hitler scored a double success: By disavowing the international troublemaker, he reassured those outside the Reich whom Hugenberg’s demands had alarmed; and he freed himself of the „old porker” whose gaffe had cost him whatever standing he had in Marshall von Hindenburg’s estimation. The „old porker” would still be heard to grunt from time to time, but it would have no effect.

The last political remnant to be got rid of had been the clerico-bourgeois „Centrum.” Following its vote in favor of plenary powers for Hitler on March 23, 1933, the Centrum had lost all credibility as an opposition party. Its following dwindled away with indifference. Monsignor Kaas having sided with the Führer in the Reichstag, why should not the rank and file do likewise?

And then, diplomatic negotiations with the Vatican aiming at a concordat were close to a favorable conclusion. In that effort, more than in any other instance of his *captatio benevolentiae*, Hitler had been guile and patience personified. He needed to assure himself of political peace with the Church at least until, with the high clergy fully involved, the adhesion of the Catholics of Germany would be general.

By voting for Hitler in the Reichstag, Msgr. Kaas and his pious clerics, without even suspecting it, had been led to the edge of the trap and fallen into it

straightaway. On July 4, 1933, rosaries in hand, they declared themselves politically neutral. As a party they were thus effectively dead.

An observer of these events at the time noted: „All the things abolished here were things that no longer interested many people.“

With regard to the demise of the two dozen or so political parties, Joachim Fest wrote: „If anything demonstrates the degree to which the Weimar Republic had lost its vitality, it is surely the passivity with which the institutions that forced its development allowed themselves to be mastered.“ (*Hitler, the Führer*, p.41).

To bury the political parties and annihilate their network of voters, once so extensive, had taken only a scant half year, with nobody hurt. And everyone now standing stiffly at attention before the corporal they had been jeering at only a year before.

The person most astonished at the rapidity with which the political parties had successively gone under was Hitler himself. He couldn't get over it.

„So pitiful a collapse one would never have believed possible,“ he remarked when he had thrown the last shovelful of dirt on the graves of the deceased.



Beloved by the people, one of the focuses of the National Socialist platform was German youth and increasing the number of children born to German families. Because of his pro-family perspective and his economic policies designed to ease the financial burden children place upon working parents, Hitler was adored not only by young people but also their parents.

CHAPTER 10

WHO WOULD END THE BANKRUPTCY?

We have the power. Now our gigantic work begins." Those were Hitler's words on the night of Jan. 30, 1933, as cheering crowds surged past beneath the windows of the Chancellery for five solid hours. His political struggle had lasted 14 years. He himself was 43, that is to say physically and intellectually at the peak of his powers. One by one he had won over millions of Germans and formed them into Germany's most powerful political party, a party surrounded by a human rampart of hundreds of thousands of storm troopers, three-fourths of them members of the working class.

He had been extremely clever. He had all but toyed with his adversaries and got round them all, one after another.

Standing there at the window, his arm raised to the delirious throng, he must have known a feeling of triumph. But he seemed almost torpid, completely absorbed, as if lost in another world.

It was a world far removed from the delirium in the street, a world consisting of 65 million citizens who loved him or hated him, but all of whom from that night on had become his responsibility. And as he knew – as almost all Germans knew at the end of January 1933 – it was a crushing, almost desperate responsibility.

More than half a century later, people no longer have any idea of the situation Germany was in at that time. Everyone believes that Germans have always been portly and plump.

Weil, the Germans Hitler inherited were skeletons.

A score of „democratic“ governments had come and gone, often in utter confusion. Instead of alienating the people's misery, they increased it, due to their own instability and because it was impossible for them to pursue any given plan for more than a year or two. Germany had arrived at a dead end, with all her politicians beating their heads against a brick wall. In some few years there had been 224,000 suicides – a horrifying figure bespeaking a state of misery even more horrifying.

By the beginning of 1933 the misery of the German people was virtually universal. Six million or more unemployed workers roamed about, hungry, receiving only a pitiful unemployment benefit of less than 42 marks per month. Many of those

out of work of course had families to feed, so that altogether some 20 million Germans, a third of the country's population, were reduced to trying to survive on about four-tenths of a mark per person per day.

The unemployment benefit, moreover, was limited to a period of six months. After that came disaster: the meager misery allowance dispensed by the welfare offices.

Notwithstanding the gross inadequacy of this assistance, by trying to save the six million unemployed from total destruction even for six months, both the state and local branches of the German government saw themselves brought to ruin. In 1932 alone such aid had swallowed up four billion marks, 57 percent of the total tax revenues of the federal government and the regional states. A good many German municipalities had gone bankrupt.

Those lucky enough to still have some kind of a job were not much better off. Workers and employees had taken a cut of 25 percent in then- wages and salaries. Twenty-one percent of them were earning between 100 and 250 marks per month; 69.2 percent of them, in January of 1933, were being paid less than 1,200 marks annually. It was estimated that the number of Germans able to live without money worries did not exceed more than about 100,000.

Over the course of the last three years before Hitler, total earnings had fallen by more than half, from 23 billion marks to 11 billion.

The average per capita income of German citizens had dropped from 1,187 marks in 1929 to 627 marks, a scarcely tolerable level, in 1932. When Hitler came to power, 90 percent of the German people were destitute.

No one escaped the strangling effects of the unemployment. The intellectuals were hit as hard as the working class. Of the 135,000 university graduates, 60 percent were without jobs. Only a tiny minority were receiving unemployment benefits.

„The others,“ wrote one foreign observer, Marcel Laloire (in his book *New Germany*), „are dependent on their parents or else sleeping in flophouses. In the daytime they can be seen on the boulevards of Berlin wearing signs on their backs to the effect that they will accept any kind of work.“

But there was no longer any kind of work.

The same drastic fall-off had occurred in Germany's cottage industries, comprising some four million workers. Their activity had declined 55 percent; their total sales had plunged from 22 billion marks to 10 billion. Construction workers

were the hardest hit of all: 90 percent of them were unemployed.

The farmers, too had been ruined, crashed by losses amounting to 12 billion marks. Many of them had been forced to mortgage their homes and their land. In 1932 just the interest on the loans they had incurred due to the crash was equivalent to 20 percent of the value of the agricultural production of the entire country. And when they were desperate at no longer being able to pay the interest, their farms were auctioned off from under them in legal proceedings: In the years 1931-1932, 17,157 farms with a combined total area of 462,485 hectares were liquidated in this way.

The Weimar „democracy“ had done absolutely nothing about such flagrant wrongs as this impoverishment of millions of farm workers, even though they were Germany's most stable citizens and the hardest working. Plundered, dispossessed, abandoned: Small wonder they heeded Hitler's call.

Their situation on Jan. 30, 1933 was tragic. Like all the rest of Germany's working class, they had been betrayed by their Marxist leaders, reduced to the alternatives of miserable wages, paltry and uncertain benefit payments or the outright humiliation of begging.

Germany's industries, formerly famous throughout the world, were no longer in a prosperous condition, despite the millions of marks in gratuities that the financial magnates felt obliged to pour into the coffers of the parties in power before each election in order to engage their complicity. And for 14 years the well-blinkered conservatives and Christian Democrats of the political center had been feeding at the trough just as greedily as their adversaries of the left.

Nothing is given for nothing. In politics, money is delivered in the form of manacles.

Despite the willing cooperation of the politicians of the old parties of all persuasions tints assured them, the bigwigs of German capitalism had experienced only a succession of catastrophes. The patchwork governments they backed, formed in the political scramble by claim and compromise, were totally ineffective. They plunged from one failure to another, never having time to make provision for anything or the will to confine themselves somehow to their proper function.

It. was inevitable that any economic plans put together amid this political milting about should fail. Time is required for the accomplishment of anything important It. is only with time that great plans may be brought to maturity and the competent men may be found who are capable of carrying them out.

Nor did the bribing of the political parties make them any less incapable of coping with the exactions ordered by the Treaty of Versailles. France, in 1923, had effectively seized Germany by the throat with her invasion of the Ruhr Basin and in six months had brought the Weimar government to pitiable capitulation. But then, disunited, hating each other, how could these political birds of passage have offered resistance? In just a few months of 1923 seven German governments came and went in swift succession. They had no choice but to submit to the humiliation of Allied control, as well as the separatist intrigues fomented by Poincaré's paid destroyers.

The substantial levies imposed percentage-wise on the sale of German goods abroad had sharply curtailed any chance Germany had to export. Under obligation to pay gigantic sums to their conquerors, the Germans had paid out billions upon billions; and when bled dry, they were forced to seek recourse in enormous loans from abroad, from the United States in particular.

This indebtedness had completed their destruction and, in 1929, precipitated Germany into a most terrifying financial crisis.

The big industrialists, for all their fat bribery payments to politicians, now found themselves powerless: their factories empty, their workers, now living as virtual vagrants, haggard of face, in the dismal working class districts nearby.

Thousands of German factories were silent, like a forest of dead trees. Many had gone under. The ones surviving were operating on a limited basis. Germany's gross industrial production had gone down by half: from seven billion marks in 1920 to three and a half billion in 1932.

The automobile industry provides a perfect example. Germany's production in 1932 was proportionately only one-twelfth that of the United States, and only one-third that of France: 682,376 cars in Germany (one for each 100 inhabitants) as against 1,855,174 cars in France, even though the latter's population was 20 million less than Germany's.

Germany had experienced a similar collapse in exports. Her trade surplus had fallen from 2.872 billion marks in 1931 to only 667 million in 1932, i.e., nearly a 75 percent drop.

Overwhelmed by the cessation of payments and the number of current accounts in the red, even the great Bank of Germany was in the process of disintegrating. Harried by demands for repayment of the foreign loans, on the day of Hitler's accession to power, the Reichsbank had in all only 83 million marks in foreign currency, 64 million of which had already been committed for disbursement on the following day.

The astronomical foreign debt, an amount exceeding that of the country's total exports for three years, was like a lead weight on the back of every German. And there was no possibility of turning to Germany's domestic financial resources for a solution: Banking activities had come virtually to a standstill. That left only taxes.

Unfortunately, taxes, too, were in a sharp decline. From 9 billion marks in 1930, total taxes had fallen to 7.8 billion in 1931; then to 6.65 billion in 1932, with unemployment alone absorbing 4 billion of that amount.

Local debts amounting to billions had also accumulated at a fearful pace. Beset as they were by millions of persons in need, the municipalities all by themselves owed 6.542 billion in 1928, an amount which had increased to 11.295 billion by 1932; and of the total, 1.668 billion were in short-term loans.

Any hope of paying off these deficits with new taxes was no longer even imaginable. Taxes had already been increased 45 percent from 1925 to 1931. During the years 1931-1932, under Chancellor Brüning, a Germany of unemployed workers and industrialists with half-dead factories had been hit with 23 „emergency“ decrees. This multiple overtaxing, moreover, had proven to be completely useless, as the „International Bank of Payments“ had clearly foreseen and stated in a pronouncement to the effect that the tax burden in Germany was already so enormous that it could not be further increased.

And so, in one pan of the financial scales: 19 billion in foreign debt plus the same amount in domestic debt – in the other: the Reichsbank's 83 million marks in foreign currency. It was as if the average German, owing his banker a debt of 6,000 marks, had less than 14 marks in his pocket to offset it.

One ineluctable consequence of this ever-increasing misery and uncertainty about the future had been the abrupt decline in the birthrate.

When your household money is down to four pennies, or nothing at all; and when you fear even greater calamities in the days ahead, you do not risk adding to the number of your dependents.

In those days births were the barometer of a country's prosperity. A child is a joy unless you have nothing but a crust of bread to put in its little hand.

That was the way it was with hundreds of thousands of German families in 1932.

The birthrate had been 33.4 per 1,000 at the time of Wilhelm II. In 1921 it was only 25.9 per 1,000. In 1924 it was down to 15.1 per 1,000; by the end of 1932, to 14.7

per thousand.

It reached that figure, moreover, thanks only to the higher rate of births in the country areas. In the fifty largest cities of the Reich, there were more deaths than births: in 45 percent of working-class families there were no births at all in the latter years. The fall in the birthrate was most pronounced of all in Berlin, which had less than one child per family and only 9.1 births per 1,000 residents. Deaths exceeded by 60 percent the number of new births.

In contrast to the birthrate, the politicians were flourishing as never before – about the only thing in Germany that was in those disastrous times. From 1919 to 1932, Germany had seen no less than 23 governments come and go, thus averaging a new government every seven months, more or less. As any sensible person must realize, such a constant upheaval and change in the political gangs in power could only render that power nugatory.

How could anyone imagine that any effective work could be done in your average factory if every eight months the board of directors, the management, the business methods and key personnel were all replaced? Of course failure would be certain.

Well, the Reich wasn't a factory of 100 or 200 workers, but of 65 million participants crushed by the exactions of the Treaty of Versailles, by industrial stagnation, by frightful unemployment, and by the gut-wrenching misery shared by the whole population.

The hundreds of Cabinet ministers who followed each other in swift succession for 13 years, due to petty parliamentary squabbles, partisan demands, and personal ambitions, were unable to achieve anything other than the certain collapse of their chaotic regime of rival parties.

Germany's situation was still further aggravated by the unrestrained competition of the 20 regional states, which split up governmental authority into units often in direct opposition to Berlin, thereby sabotaging incessantly even what little power the central government was limited to at the time.

The regional remnants of several centuries of particularism were all fiercely jealous of their privileges. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 had divided Germany into more than thirty Lilliputian states, most of them musical comedy kingdoms where each of the petty kings had played at Louis XIV in courts complete with frills and reverential bows.

Even at the beginning of the First World War (1914-1918), the German Reich

consisted of four distinct States, each with its sovereign, its army, its flag, its titles of nobility, and its Grand Cross in colored enamel.

The Bavarian clung fiercely to his lederhosen, his pots of beer and his pipe. He went to war to preserve them. The Saxon would gladly have had a go-around with the haughty Prussian. Each was intent on his rights. And faraway Berlin was a thorn in the side for all of them.

Each of these regional states was set up with its own separate government and with a president of the council. Altogether they presented a lineup of 59 ministers who, added to the 11 ministers of the Reich and the 42 senators of the free cities (who were just another kind of council president), gave the Germans a collection of 112 ministers, who viewed each other with a jaundiced eye at best.

As for the deputies of the Reich, of these 22 states, and of the 42 free cities, they numbered in the thousands: between two and three thousand, elected by dozens of rival parties.

At the time of the last elections to the Reichstag, barely two months before the accession of Hitler to the chancellorship, there had been no less than 37 different political parties competing, with a total of 7,000 candidates (14 of them by proxy), all with their hands out and frantically seeking a piece of the parliamentary pie.

It was downright strange: the more discredited the party system became, the greater the number of democratic champions there were to be seen gesturing and jostling in their eagerness to get on the gravy train.

Those elected, to all appearances, were there forever, with fat salaries (a deputy of the Reich got 10 times what the average worker earned), and awarding themselves solid supplementary income in the form of kind favors provided by interested clients, such as the sumptuous fur coats that some of the socialist deputies of Berlin had arranged to have offered their wives by certain financiers.

In a democracy, parliamentary mandates are often very brief and ministerial appointments even more so. The temptation is strong to get it while you can.

Honest, dishonest, or piratical, these 112 Cabinet ministers and thousands of deputies had converted Germany into a country that was ungovernable. By January of 1933 they had been completely discredited. That was incontestable. Whoever might succeed them was left nothing but a country in ruins.

Half a century later, in an era when so many are living in abundance, it is hard to believe that the Germany of January 1933 had come to such a point of decline. But

for anyone who studies the archives and the relevant documents of that time, no doubt is possible. That's the way it was. Not a single figure in this balance sheet of failure is invented. In January of 1933 Germany was down and bleeding to death.

All the former chancellors, such as Brüning and Papen and Schleicher, who had undertaken to set Germany back on her feet, had failed. To take back in hand a country fallen into such a state of total disarray as Germany in January 1933, a man would need to be a genius or – as the people said – to be slightly cracked.

Then President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, at this same time, was charged with resolving the American crisis, he had at his disposal immense reserves of gold. Hitler, standing silently at the chancellery window on that night of Jan. 30, 1933, knew that he, on the contrary, could not count on anything but an empty treasury. No one was going to be making him any presents. The aged Hindenburg had given him a reckoning sheet full of appalling figures of indebtedness.

But Hitler had wanted it that way. He felt he had the strength of will to create Germany anew politically, socially, financially, and economically. He would be starting from zero; indeed, from less than zero. But he knew how to quickly convert that nothing into a Germany more powerful than ever before known.

Did he have backing?

Millions of Germans were still his adversaries, disconcerted adversaries, to be sure, whom their political parties had betrayed, but who had not thus far been won over to National Socialism. On the evening of Jan. 1933, Hitler nonetheless had a following in the whole of Germany of some 13 million voters, many of them former socialists and Communists.

The two sides – those for and those against Hitler – were very nearly equal in numbers, but the ones on the left were at odds with each other, whereas Hitler's disciples were strongly united. And in one thing above all, the National Socialists had an incomparable advantage: in their convictions and their total faith in a leader. Their strongly structured party had contended with the worst kind of obstacles, and it had overcome them. On that night of Jan. 30, they all knew and were moved by the thrill of victory.

Hitler had now officially come to power.



Aug 29, 1933 – Berlin, Germany: Adolf Hitler, who had been named Reichs Chancellor seven months before, is here seated with German President Hindenburg (not shown in picture), about a year before Hindenburg's death. The two ruled jointly from January 30, 1933 through August 1, 1934, though Hitler's National Socialist German Worker's Party controlled parliament and directed German policy during this period.

CHAPTER 11

THE UNIFICATION OF THE STATE

It will be the pride of my life if I can say at the end of my days that I won back the German worker and restored him to his rightful place in the Reich," Those were Hitler's words when he first became chancellor, and they meant that he intended not merely to put men back to work, but to see to it that the worker acquired not just rights but prestige as well within the national community.

The national community had long been rather the proverbial wicked stepmother in its relationship with the German workingman. The class struggle had not been the exclusive initiative of the Marxists. It had also been a fact of life with a privileged class, the capitalists, who sought to dominate the working class. So the German worker, feeling himself treated like a pariah, had withdrawn from a fatherland that often considered him merely an instrument of production.

In the eyes of the capitalists, money was the sole active element that assured the flourishing of a country's economy. To Hitler's way of thinking, that conception was radically wrong: It was capital, on the contrary, that was an instrument Labor was the essential element man's endeavor, man's honor, the blood, muscles and soul of the society.

Hitler did not wish merely to put an end to the class struggle, but to reestablish the priority of the human being injustice and respect as the principal factor in production.

One could dispense with gold, and Hitler would do so. A dozen other things could be substituted for gold as a means of stimulating industrial activity, and Hitler would invent them. But as for work, it was the indispensable structure.

For the worker to return with trust in the fatherland, he had to feel that henceforth he was to be given consideration and treated with equity, instead of remaining a social subordinate, a status he had held for too long time under the governments of the so-called democratic parties of both the left and the right; for none of them had ever understood that in the hierarchy of values of a people, work is the very essence of life; and matter, be it steel or gold, only a tool.

The objective then went far beyond merely sending six million unemployed back to work. It was a matter of achieving the victory of a total revolution: in the

conception of the classes, of their balanced collaboration.

“The people,” Hitler declared, „were not put here on earth for the sake of the economy, and the economy doesn’t exist for the sake of capital. On the contrary, capital is meant to serve the economy, and the economy in turn to serve the people.”

It would not serve merely to reopen the thousands of closed factories and fill them with workers anew, for if the old concepts were still adhered to, the workers would once again be nothing more than living machines, faceless and interchangeable.

What was required was to reestablish that moral equilibrium between the workers, human beings who shape raw materials, and a useful and controlled capitalism returned to its proper function as a tool. That would mean changing an entire world, and it would take time.

As Hitler knew full well, a revolution of that kind could not be achieved while the central and regional governments continued in a state of anarchy, merely spinning their wheels, almost never accomplishing anything and often running wild. Nor could there be a revolution in the society’ while hordes of parties and thousands of deputies of every conceivable stripe were meddling with the operation of a political system that in any case had been thrashing about incoherently since 1919.

Reestablishment of the effectiveness of Germany’s institutions on a nationwide basis was therefore an indispensable prerequisite to any social renaissance. „A fish goes rotten at the head,” says a Russian proverb.

It was at the head that political Germany prior to Hitler was going bad. The dozens of successive governments of the Reich, all shaky and all conflicting, had finally abdicated without even defending themselves. The aged Marshal von Hindenburg in 1931 and 1932 had arbitrarily replaced them with semi-dictatorships, which were themselves doubtful of being able to do anything.

The last chancellors, Heir Brüning, Herr von Papen, and Gen. Schleicher, had been able to maintain themselves only by issuing executive orders. Their authority, artificially imposed by misuse of Article 84 of the German constitution, was at the mercy of any unexpected perfidy. This was amply demonstrated in 1932, when Herr von Papen had to swallow a particularly humiliating vote of opposition in the Reichstag by a 94 percent majority of the deputies.

The accession to power of Hitler had put an end to such political excesses. However, Hindenburg had demanded that the new chancellor be surrounded like a prisoner in his own government the Führer had been obliged to name four times as

many conservative ministers – basically reactionaries – as his own men to his first government a sum total of only two National Socialists to start out with.

Hindenburg's representatives had been given the mission of keeping Hitler on a leash. And at the very first meeting of the Reichstag in March of 1933, Hitler had broken the leash, not by imposing an executive order in the fashion of the erstwhile von Papens, but by obtaining an absolute parliamentary majority giving him plenary powers for a period of four years.

Four years in power for planning, creating, making decisions. Politically, it was a revolution: Hitler's first revolution. And completely democratic, as had been every stage of his rise. His initial triumph had come through the support of the electorate; and now, in the same manner, the real and long-term governmental power granted him by the Reichstag had been by a vote of more than three-quarters of the nation's deputies elected in a system of universal suffrage.

That was a clear principle with Hitler: no power without the freely given approval of the people. He used to say: „If you can win mastery over the people only by imposing the power of the state, you'd better figure on a nine o'clock curfew.”

Nowhere in 20th-century Europe had the authority of a head of state ever been based on such overwhelming and freely given national consent. Prior to Hitler, from 1919 to 1932, the virtuously self-styled democratic governments had come to power only by meager majorities of perhaps 51 or 52 percent.

And that without regard to abstentions in the voting.

„I am not a dictator,” Hitler had often affirmed, „and I never shall be. Democracy will be rigorously enforced by National Socialism.”

Authority does not mean tyranny. A tyrant is someone who puts himself in power without the will of the people or against the will of the people. A democrat is placed in power by the people. But democracy is not limited to a single formula. It may be partisan or parliamentary. Or it may also be authoritarian. The important thing is that the people have wished it, chosen it, established it in its given form.

That was the case with Hitler. His establishment in power had been essentially democratic. Whether we like it or not, the fact is undeniable: Year after year the German people came out ever more strongly in favor of Hitler. The more intelligent of those who initially contemned him were unable to deny it – men such as the declared anti-Nazi historian and professor Joachim Fest, whom we here find it useful to cite in three successive statements:

„It was never Hitler’s wish merely to put together a regime based on force. It would be a grave misconception of the nature of the man and of his motivation to see nothing but his thirst for power.”

„He was not born to become a mere tyrant. He was obsessed with the idea of his mission.”

„Never more than at that moment had he felt so dependent on the masses nor watched for their reaction with more anxiety.” (Joaquim Fest, *Hitler the Führer*, pp, 44f).

Those are not lines written by Doctor Goebbels, but by a pitiless analyst of Hitler’s activities.

By Feb. 28, 1933, less than a month after his installment as chancellor, and under close watch, Hitler had already managed to free himself of the conservative tutelage with which Hindenburg had thought to chain him down. The Reichstag fire had allowed him to obtain an order from the old marshal „For the Protection of the People and the State,” which considerably increased the powers of the executive.

However, Hitler meant to obtain not just concessions ruefully granted by a pliable old man, but plenary authority legally accorded him by the supreme democratic institution: the Reichstag. Hitler prepared his coup with the skill, the patience, and the astuteness for which he was legendary.

„He possessed,” Fest says, „an intelligence that included above all a sure sense of the rhythm to be observed in the making of decisions.”

Hitler at first did his best to shower attentions on the old field marshal, who was fond of calling up the past. With apparent extraordinary humility, on March 21, 1933, before the inauguration of the new Reichstag, Hitler arranged a ceremony in Potsdam, in Hindenburg’s honor, that was a masterpiece of meditation, majesty and beauty. There was something in it to satisfy every vanity.

Hindenburg had retired his old uniform of 1914-1918. In order that the old man might meet again with Germans of his time, Hitler had rounded up from all over Germany veterans of all the wars. From the war of 1871 (62 years before!) against Napoleon III. From the war of 1866 (67 years before!) against Denmark. Even from the war of 1864 (69 years before!) against the Austrian Empire.

Unfortunately, the occasion lacked a veteran or two from the Battle of Leipzig (October 1813). Diligent searching in all the retirement homes of the Reich had failed to turn one up. Still, for someone on the retirement list of 1911, to be surrounded by

comrades from 1864 had to be a heartwarming occasion.

Hitler bowed his head before the old man like a mere master of ceremony. He had arranged to preserve the principal seat in the loge of the former Emperor Wilhelm II, unoccupied for fourteen years, so that Hindenburg could halt before the empty armchair and make his salute, his marshal's baton raised, as if the mustachioed monarch were still there.

For Hindenburg, this homage paid him was his hour supreme. He had always remained the loyal servant of the emperor. The reminder of the dethroned former sovereign overwhelmed his memory. A year and a half later, in the shadow of his death agonies he would think that the time of the former court had come back again, and in his delusion would call Hitler „Majesty“!

At Potsdam on that March 21, 1933 the octogenarian marshal had relived the glorious past of the German monarchy. Hitler had very quietly had him descend into the crypt and place crowns before the tombs of his old master and of Frederick the Great. The old man's eyes were rimmed with tears. Hitler was the first man since the defeat of 1918 to afford him such joy. He regarded him with emotion and leaned on his arm almost as if Hitler had been his son. The young chancellor of the revolution had touched his heart.

A month and a half earlier, Hindenburg had commissioned Papen, Hugenberg, Neurath and the like to clamp restraints on Hitler „until he hollered,“ That was now over. No one would manipulate the feeble old man further. Hitler had won him over in front of an empty armchair and down inside a crypt.

By thus baptizing the new Reichstag in the historic Royal Palace of Prussia, Hitler had also made some headway in winning over the Old Guard, giving the old monarchist gentlemen the impression that he was not altogether insensitive to the idea of a restoration.

Would that stable boy of a Hitler put the emperor back in the saddle?

The interim prudence of the new chancellor was calculated with precision. “There is no need to destroy the existing institutions,” Hitler gave assurance, „until there is something better to put in their place.”

He still for a time had need of men like von Papen and other capitalist troglodytes. He kept them at his side while driving them around Potsdam during the celebration, the festive city bedecked not only with Nazi banners but equally with the black-white-and-red flags of the empire of former times that had been resurrected for the occasion. Brass bands bustled about sounding heroic marches fit to make their

old chests swell.

And so there, too, the scarcely camouflaged aversion to *the parvenu* was softened. His troglodytes had been tamed and were ready to cooperate that same year.

But the army especially had been the object of Hitler's most ardent marks of consideration.

Hitler had an absolute need for the army in 1933. The army had only very reluctantly tolerated his rise to power. A corporal in the chancellery had seemed intolerable to those haughty generals with icy eyes behind their monocles. They felt they were the ones to be giving thought to the state and considered themselves endowed with the royal prerogative of supervising the political machinery.

On Jan. 31, 1933 they had not been called upon either to pass judgment on Hitler or to ratify his nomination. The old field marshal had sternly sent away Gen. von Hammerstein, who had come to bring him the non *possumus* of the General Staff. Since then the latter had barely tolerated the intruder.

A coup d'état by that proud military caste could have swept him and his party and his plans for the future all away.

With the military, by nature so imperious, he made use of the cleverness that was his own special weapon. The army was accorded a position of honor at Potsdam. The troops presented arms on one side of the entry to the royal palace, with the men of the SA lined up on the walk facing them. Together they formed the guard of honor of a Germany restored to harmony.

As for the generals, in their boots and trappings, gleaming with decorations, their chests thrown out, they formed a heroic retinue for their old commander, and all turned toward him like heliotropes following the sun.

At last, after 14 years of being shunted aside in the democracy, they had come out again into the light and the glory. So Corporal Hitler was perhaps not so despicable as they had thought.

The corporal, standing at attention, and in civilian clothes moreover, had understood that it was important, in appearances at least, to keep his distance.

Hitler, with head bowed, had won his armistice.

And the people?

In the twinkling of an eye, Hitler and Dr. Goebbels made the radio, from which they had for so long been barred (and which had been used by their enemies only in a mediocre fashion), their number one weapon. It had taken only a month and a half for the radio to stir up public opinion, retransmitting each of Hitler's speeches with a broadcast power hitherto unknown.

At Potsdam, radio provided the most spectacular fireworks. Goebbels had set up his microphones everywhere: in front of Hindenburg, behind Hindenburg, in the royal crypt, close to the military brass bands, and even on the ridges of houses, where the announcers risked their skins. One of them, notably enough, was a young Nazi deputy named Baldur von Schirach, who in 1946 would find himself in the dock before the vengeful Americans of the Nuremberg Tribunal.

All of Germany had been on the edge of their seats during the hours of listening to the excited reporting of events. Millions of Germans had felt comforted at hearing the old hymns again and in following the description of Hindenburg's every move: the solemn, honored, venerated Hindenburg. In the black days of the past, the old warrior had represented hope. In his extreme old age he had become the symbol of a millenarian Germany. It was, as historian Fest wrote, „the feast of reconciliation gorgeously presented.”

„Many functionaries, officers, and jurists of the bourgeois class who had evinced extreme reserve, abandoned their distrust.” Hitler had found the key to many a door that had hitherto been locked against him.

The Berlin press wrote on the following day; „National enthusiasm swept over Germany yesterday like a great storm.”

Potsdam had been a grandiose theatrical stage where everyone had taken a part in the performance, Hitler's adversaries and those indifferent alike. Feverishly glued to their radios, all Germany had participated in the spectacle, at first curious, then gripped by emotion.

„A strange mixture of tactician and visionary,” Joachim Fest would write, sizing up Hitler, the extraordinary stage manager. For Hitler had marshals, generals, and high dignitaries of no mean intelligence all on his stage and had put them through their paces as though they had been tin soldiers. But Hitler's field of vision extended far, far beyond these puppets for a day.

In order to establish his new state in definitive form, Hitler now proposed to obtain the official ratification of the Reichstag which would ensure his authority to the fullest extent for a period of several years. He would not have legally admissible plenary powers, especially for so long a period, unless the German constitution were first modified, and that would require public approval by two-thirds of the members

of the parliament.

Well, Hitler, with 17,300,000 votes, had obtained a total of 288 seats in the elections of March 1933 for the new Reichstag. His allies of the moment, the delegates of Papen and Hugenberg (charged with keeping an eye on him), with 4,750,000 votes, had garnered another 52 seats, making a total of 340 deputies.

Even deducting the invalidated Communist vote, the opposition, hardcore or moderate, mustered 232 members: 126 socialists (Social Democrats), 92 Centrum (Catholic) deputies, and 14 others.

In a normal vote (half of those voting plus one), Hitler would have carried easily. But to alter the constitution so as to give him full powers, he had to capture a majority of two-thirds. Those two-thirds represented 376 votes, 36 more than he could count on.

At first sight, then, approval was impossible. The Centrum, the national refuge of sanctimonious hypocrites, had for 10 years made a show of outspoken anti-Hitlerism, unhesitatingly using religion as a partisan weapon and denying religious burial to National Socialists assassinated by Communist killers. Hitler, with the assistance of Goering, who was the National Socialist president of the Reichstag, was going to have to baptize that holy congregation.

The president of the Centrum was Monsignor Kaas, a squat and pudgy prelate who, in lieu of guiding souls, had always found the collecting and hoodwinking of voters more exciting and thus much preferred. Hitler piously flattered him and dangled before him the promise of a rapprochement between the Nazi state and the Church, a promise moreover that was real and which Hitler made effective the following summer. The prelate, beguiled, imagined that he was going to baptize anew the repentant son.

Between the incense and the candles, the Centrum was seduced. A few of the independents also yielded. When it came to a vote, the plenary powers were accorded to Hitler by the enormous majority of 441 to 94: Hitler had won constitutionally not just two-thirds, but 82.44 percent of the votes of the Assembly. The „Law of Plenary Powers“ thus approved granted to Hitler for four years virtually absolute authority over the legislative as well as the executive affairs of the government.

The five paragraphs of that „Law for the Alleviation of the Misery of the People“ were brief and to the point:

1. Laws may be promulgated by the government of the Reich apart from the

procedures provided by the Constitution.

2. Laws promulgated by the government of the Reich may deviate from the Constitution provided they do not have as their aim a modification of the Reichstag or of the Reichsrat. The duties of the President of the Reich are not modified.

3. Laws promulgated by the government of the Reich will be ratified by the Chancellor and published in the „Official Journal.“ They become effective on the day following publication.

4. Treaties concluded with foreign states do not need to be ratified by the legislative body. The government itself will publish any regulations necessary for their execution.

5. This law, valid until the 1st of April of 1937, will become effective on the day of its promulgation. It will be abrogated if another government succeeds the present government

Berlin, 24 March 1933
Von Hindenburg, Hitler, Frick
von Neurath, Krosigk

The parliamentary democracy, in the constitutional exercise of its powers, had thus settled, on March 24, 1933, the problem of the authoritarian state. Now it remained to provide a solution to the problems of the states, that is to say, the disorderly horde of 22 regional states, as well as the 52 governments of the Free Cities, the hundreds of local ministers, and the 2,400 deputies busily astir in the 22 separate parliamentary districts, For the most part they were nullities, and there was no love lost between them; but for 14 years, every time there had been a chance to thwart the central government in Berlin, they had become as one.

It was inconceivable that a strong government such as the one Hitler had just set up could continue with those 2,000+ carping politicians questioning its every move.

As a matter of fact Germany was tired of that frittering away of authority, of the perpetual contradictions, the pettiness, the discord, and the anarchy for which in the last analysis it was the people who paid.

„It is a fact,“ wrote French historian Benoist-Méchin, „that the unification of the states and the Reich answered one of the most profound aspirations of the German people. They had had enough of being torn apart by the constant threats of secession

of the provincial governments. For centuries they had dreamed of being part of a single community." (*Histoire de ('Armee Allemande*, Vol. UI, p.117).

It looked easy, since public opinion demanded the abolishment of the administrative mess. But a reform of that nature necessarily would bruise the vanity of thousands and collide head-on with many very special local interests.

A man who is a council president or a minister, even if just of a regional state, does not easily resign himself to being no more than a private citizen, to becoming once again a provincial lawyer scampering to the courthouse with coattails flying, or mayhap only a sausage maker. And the 2,400 deputies were bitter as well at losing the good life they had known and loved. Gone the homage, the bowing and scraping, the decorations, the junkets at public expense, the discreet gratuities that were ever so comforting!

Who among us does not make a wry face when swallowing bitter medicine?

It had to be; for Hitler had his eyes fixed on the national goal: a unified Reich.

That did not mean of course that in eliminating the regional administrations Hitler had any desire to have done with the distinctive identities of the several provinces of the Reich. On the contrary, he believed that the life of a country ought never to be monopolized by its one, often artificial, capital city, but should rather be nourished and constantly renewed by the blooming of dozens of centers of culture in regions rich in their varied manners and mores and the legacy of their past.

He believed that the nation was the harmonious conjunction of these profound and original variations. And that a state conscious of its real powers ought to promote such variety, not smother it.

The scattering of political power had not favored the variety but had on the contrary diminished it, depriving it of the cohesion a large community brings.

The 22 separate administrative entities, rivals of the central government and often of each other, were a source of disorder. A nation must consist of regions that know and esteem each other and that gain mutual enrichment from their interlinking rather than each withdrawing into a culture that is strangled by an exclusive and restrictive provincialism. And only a strong power could assure the flowering of all of the separate regions within a single collective order.

In sum, what Hitler intended was that each region should bring its share of original culture to the totality of a German Reich that had put an end to the two dozen factitious administrations.

From 1871 to 1933 the various rulers of Germany had all run into the obstacle of this political particularism. Even a leader as gifted as Bismarck had been unable to achieve the unification of the twenty-two disparate states and the 45 Free Cities all like weathercocks on their respective towers.

And now, where the leaders of the old empire and later of the Weimar Republic had failed, or had not dared to take the risk, Hitler, in a few months was going to convert that division and discord into a potent and effective unity.

Hitler was hardly more than moved into his office overlooking the chancellery garden, where squirrels cracked nuts in the trees and at times even leaped into the building itself, when he had a law in hand ordering the unification of the lands of the Reich.

The first of the states that would be made to toe the line was Bavaria, which up to that point had been the bellwether of the more belligerent separatists and hidebound monarchists.

Hitler's plans were no sooner known than several of the Bavarian ministers devised a plan to resurrect front retirement the old fogy, ex-Prince Ruprecht, the same man who in November of 1923 as an ordinary private citizen had played a part, with a good deal of bragging, in blocking Hitler's putsch.

The Chancellor on this occasion answered their little plot with sudden and crushing force, bringing the whole of the Bavarian administration to heel in one night. In the morning Lt. Gen., von Epp was named Commissioner of the Reich in Munich.

Almost all the other regional states fell by themselves, like a house of cards.

The most difficult state to liquidate had been Prussia, an enormous bastion (a third of Germany) lying right in the very heart of the country.

Prussia truly constituted a state within the state, a special government It had held Chancellor Brüning completely in check in 1931, and Brüning had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Marxists, even though their party had just been beaten to a pulp by Hitler's candidates in the Prussian elections.

Chancellor von Papen, too, after a year of shilly-shallying and delay, found he had to come to grips with Prussia, which was very nearly as strong as the central government.

When Hitler had obtained the chancellorship, he had been obliged – because

Hindenburg demanded it – to let this same von Papen have the direction of the Prussian state; and it was only with great effort on his part that he had managed to have Goering named assistant to von Papen, as minister of the interior.

The autonomy of the Prussian government, more than any other, had to be liquidated if the central government were not to be subject at every moment to defeat in its own capital.

The matter was especially delicate due to the fact of keeping von Papen, the Junker, in the Prussian presidency. But to drive him out was to risk being ousted himself by the old field marshal.

Hitler at that point surpassed himself in versatility and guile. Within a month, by dint of flattery von Papen let himself be gently pushed toward the door. Hitler all but dictated for him the letter dated April 7, 1933 in which the vice-chancellor acknowledged that the Law on the Unification of the Lands of the Reich „was a legal edifice destined to be of great historic importance in the development of the German Reich.”

That being so, von Papen further recognized that „the dualism existing between the Reich and Prussia” had to come to an end. In his letter he even compared Hitler to Prince Otto von Bismarck.

Hitler soothed his wounded pride. He declared publicly that he would never have been able to undertake the political reunification of the Reich alone, that the great architect of the achievement had been von Papen.

Without turning a hair, he wrote to Feldmarschall von Hindenburg:

In assuming the functions of Commissioner of the Reich in Prussia during the difficult period following the 30th of January, Herr von Papen has deserved very great credit for contributing so strongly to the working out of a strict coordination between the policies of the Reich and those of the regional states. His collaboration with the Cabinet of the Reich, to which he will henceforth be able to devote himself completely, will be of priceless assistance to me. The feelings I have for him are such that I rejoice in having the benefit of his cooperation, which will be of inestimable value to me.

At this little masterpiece of hypocrisy, the marshal responded with another little masterpiece, this one addressed to von Papen:

Dear Herr von Papen:

I have just accepted your request that you be relieved of your duties as

commissioner of the Reich for Prussia I take this opportunity to thank you, in the name of the Reich and in my own name, for the eminent service which you have rendered the nation by eliminating the dualism existing between the Reich and Prussia and by imposing the idea of a common political direction of the Reich and the regional states. I have learned with satisfaction that you will henceforth be able to devote all your energies to the government of the Reich.

With feelings of sincere comradeship, I remain your devoted

Von Hindenburg,
President of the Reich

In 24 hours, ex-Chancellor von Papen had lost the sole effective power he possessed. He was still – for how long? – in the inner circle of Hitler’s government. But what was he really other than a silent accompanist, with people smiling behind his back?

Hitler immediately named Goering in his stead as the Prussian President of the Council, getting on with the burial without delay.

Other interments followed in a funeral procession. And Hitler placed a votive crown on each coffin as the lid was nailed down.

The process was regulated like a ballet.

Act One: the regional parliamentary power was transferred smoothly into the hands of men who had Hitler’s confidence.

Act Two; Those men announced the acceptance of the „Law of Unification.“

Act Three: the regional parliament proclaimed the dissolution of the local state, now become unnecessary.

Act Four: To administer the region thus politically absorbed, Hitler appointed a *Statthalter*, or commissioner of the Reich, who was permanently charged with „attending to the execution of the political directives dictated by the Chancellor.“

In the Grand Duchies of Baden and Saxony there had been a few verbal skirmishes, but they had been quickly squelched.

As for the Free City of Hamburg (population a million and a half), long a socialist stronghold, it had grumbled a bit for form’s sake, imagining that it was being asked to cut its own throat, but only a few hours of negotiations were required

to make it see the light.

In a few weeks the circuit had been completed, and the 22 regional states were only a memory.

Even before the end of 1933 Hitler had thus succeeded in transforming the faltering power of the Reich into a formidable instrument of action, legitimized on March 23, 1933, by the overwhelming majority vote of approval by the Reichstag.

Thanks to that approval, and by virtue of the Law of Special Powers, he had been able constitutionally to eliminate the 22 rival states, the constellation of 45 Free Cities, and the some 2,400 regional deputies, who had distinguished themselves most notably in their assemblies by their pompous uselessness.

„It all went much faster than we had dared hope,“ Goebbels pointed out with delight and a shade of sarcasm.

In she paragraphs of only a few lines the „Law for the Rebuilding of the Reich“ had prescribed the details of the change:

1. Representation of the regional states is abolished.
2. (a) The sovereign rights of the regional states are transferred to the government of the Reich.
2. (b) the governments of the regional states are subject to the government of the Reich.
3. The *Statthalter* are subject to the authority of the Minister of the Interior of the Reich.
4. The government of the Reich may modify the constitutional right of the regional states.
5. The Minister of the Interior will issue the legal and administrative decrees necessary for the application of this law.
6. This law will become effective on the day of its official publication.

Berlin, 30 January 1934,
Von Hindenburg, Hitler, Frick

Bismarck, the Iron Chancellor, would never have thought of a reunification of that kind, within an authoritarian state so firmly hierarchical in organization. Hitler had made the attempt, and he had succeeded. Germany had now attained to a power more mighty than any she had before known in her history. And had done so, moreover, by democratic means.

„Our power,” Hitler could then declare, „no longer belongs to any territorial fraction of the Reich, nor to any single class of the nation, but to the people in their totality.”

The explanation was offered after 1945 that the German people had lost their heads. In any event, they acted of their own free will. They were not resigned; they were enthusiastic. That is a historical fact.

„For the first time since the last days of the monarchy,” historian Joachim Fest was forced to admit, „the Majority of the Germans now had the feeling that they could identify with the state” (Fest, *op.cit.*, p.76).

But what about the political parties?

Because even if an authoritarian state had just transformed all of the tens of millions of Bavarians and Saxons and Prussians and residents of Hamburg all into citizens of one and the same Reich, with only one ruler; and even if the anthill of petty states, all more or less separatist in nature, had been leveled, there still remained in Germany the political parties. To be sure, they had been discredited. But where appetites, however dissembled, remained hearty, ambitions could arise again and impenitent politicians seek to erode anew the underpinnings of the state.

They were scarcely in a position to complain. They themselves, on the preceding 23rd of March, had voted in the overwhelming majority for the „Law of Plenary Powers.”

Now their wings had been clipped, their prerogatives taken away. They no longer served any purpose, were an encumbrance on the political system. They were useless, superfluous.

How would Hitler get rid of them?

CHAPTER 12

UNIFICATION OF THE LABOR UNIONS

One power besides the political parties and the semi-autonomous cities and states still existed: the Marxist trade unions. For a long time they had represented the most important force in the Reich. Theoretically they were only a social force, but at every opportunity also a political force, furnishing Communism with its militants and the Social Democrats with the bulk of their voters.

For 15 years they had been a constant and fanatical pressure group, stirring up turmoil in the streets and formulating ever greater demands. They had also long provided the Left with funds in the millions, funds that were continually replenished by the contributions of millions of union members.

But there again, even well before the party-ridden Weimar Republic collapsed, disillusion had spread through the masses of the working people. They were starving. The hundreds of socialist and Communist deputies were standing idly by, incapable of bringing about the slightest betterment in the desperate situation of the proletariat.

They had not attempted or even suggested anything that might have been able to remedy the distress of the people even partially. No plan for large-scale public works. No industrial restructuring. No search for markets abroad.

And, moreover, no energetic resistance to the pillaging by foreign countries that was sucking away in unending billions the last resources of the Reich: this in consequence of the Treaty of Versailles that the German socialists had voted to ratify in June of 1919 and which they had never had the guts to oppose effectively thereafter.

The few modifications wrested with great difficulty from the rapacious Allies had been achieved by a conservative, Gustav Stresemann, the minister of foreign affairs, who, although always without support or even sabotaged by the parties, fought stubbornly to liberate the Reich despite his faltering health, his fainting fits, and the goiter growing ever more enormous that was knotted around his neck like a boa constrictor. This dying man was the only one who had attempted to pry the foreign talons from the flesh of the German people, and he was in no way a Marxist.

In 1930, 1931 and 1932, German workers had watched the disaster grow the

number of unemployed rise from two million to three, to four, to five, then to six million; the unemployment benefits fall lower and lower, or completely disappear.

Everywhere one saw dejection and privation, emaciated mothers, children fading away in sordid lodgings, thousands of beggars in long sad lines.

The failure of the leftist leaders to act, or their incapacity, or their total lack of sensitivity had stupefied the working class. Of what use were such leaders with their empty heads and empty hearts – and often enough full pockets?

Already, well before Jan. 30, 1933, thousands of workers had joined up with Hitler's dynamic formations that were always hard at it in the society where they were most needed, never afraid to give their full support to strikes that displeased the bourgeoisie. And Hitler, himself a former worker and a plain man like themselves, wanted to eliminate unemployment root and branch; he wanted not just to defend the laborers' right to work, but to make their occupation one of honor, to make them respected, and to integrate them fully into a living community of all the Germans who had formerly been set up class against class.

Hitler's victorious troops in January of 1933 were largely proletarian in character, composed of tough customers and battlers who socially no longer counted.

Membership in the Marxist unions had fallen off enormously: Among 13 million socialist and Communist voters in 1932, no more than five million were union members.

Moreover, lassitude and discouragement were such that many were not even paying their union dues any longer.

The other eight million had withdrawn into their shells, or moved on into the ranks of the SA.

The socialist leaders had lost confidence and were beginning to wonder if perhaps the millions of deserters were the ones who had seen things clearly.

Soon they wouldn't wonder any longer.

Even before Hitler had obtained the Reichstag vote on his Law of Plenary Powers, the Federation of Marxist Unions had begun to rally to the National Socialist side.

None other than historian Joachim Fest writes: „On March 20 the presidency of the federation addressed a kind of *message of loyalty* to Hitler.”

It was better than that the unions had always clamored to have the 1st of May recognized as a worker's holiday, but the Weimar Republic had never acceded to their request. Hitler, never missing an opportunity, seized this one with both hands, not just approving the reasonable demand but amplifying it: He proclaimed the 1st of May a national holiday.

Even as the Socialist Party had gone from its anti-Hitler vote in the Reichstag (March 23, 1933) to a pro vote (May 12, 1933), the union leaders made a 180-degree turn in only a few weeks. What they had begged every government for 15 years to grant them, Hitler was turning into a holiday celebrated by the entire nation, just like that! He announced that in order to magnify labor, he himself would organize the biggest meeting in Germany's history on the 1st of May at the Tempelhof airfield in Berlin. Caught unprepared but on the whole very pleased to take advantage of the decision to throw in their lot with National Socialism and, what is more, to become an active element in that demonstration whose like a Marxist worker could scarcely imagine, the union leaders called together the mass of their leftist members and invited them to go, with banners flying, to Tempelhof on the 1st of May, and acclaim Hitler.

I attended that memorable meeting myself.

As early as nine o'clock in the morning giant columns, some of workers, others of young people, beating a cadence on the pavement of Berlin's great avenues, had started off toward the airfield whither Hitler had called together all of Germany. Yes, Germany, for the entire country would follow the popular ceremony as it was transmitted by all the radio stations.

By noon hundreds of thousands of workers – Hitlerites and non-Hitlerites – were spread out over the vast plain. Impeccable order was maintained. Hundreds of improvised tables, set up by the party, provided the ever increasing crowds of people with sandwiches, sausages and mugs of beer at cost, to put new heart, into those arriving.

All of course were standing.

They would remain standing for 12 or 14 hours.

A fabulous speaker's platform stood out against the sky, three stories high, flamboyant with immense flags, as impressive as a naval shipyard. As the hours went, by, thousands of important personages were seated there, the diplomatic corps in full force, honored foreign guests. At close of day a million and a half spectators were massed to the outermost edges of the grass of the immense flat area, the army and the people all mingled together. Fanfares were sounding. It wasn't a political

meeting any longer; it was a festival, a sort, of fantastic scene as shown in Brueghel's *The Kermess*, where members of the middle class, generals and workers met and fraternized, all Germans and all equals.

Night arrived, and with it Hitler. His speaker's platform was like the prow of a giant ship. The hundreds of beacons illuminating the sea of humanity had been extinguished. Suddenly Hitler alone burst forth from the dark, way up in the air, in the dazzling glare of spotlights.

In the dark, a group of one kind or another could easily have set up a racket or otherwise sabotaged the meeting. A third perhaps of the people present had been socialists or Communists only three months previously. But not a single hostile voice was heard during the entire ceremony. It was carried off to universal acclamation.

Ceremony is the right word for it. It was an almost magical ceremony. Hitler and Goebbels had no equals in the arranging of dedicatory ceremonies of this sort

First there were popular songs, then great Wagnerian hymns to grip the audience. Germany has a passion for orchestral music, and Wagner tapped into the deepest and most secret vein of the German soul, of its romanticism, its inborn sense of the powerful and the grand. Meanwhile the hundreds of speaker's platform flags floated in the night at the top of their poles, caught in arrows of light.

It was then that Hitler advanced to the rostrum, For the crowd at the end of the field, his face could have appeared no larger than a butterfly's wing. But his words at once flooded across the acres of people making up his audience. A Latin audience would have preferred a voice less harsh, more delicately expressive. But there was no doubt that it answered to the psychology of the German people.

The Germans have rarely had the good fortune to enjoy the enchantment of the Word. Germany has always had plenty of ponderous speakers passionately fond of notes and conformity. Hitler, as an orator, was a prodigy, the greatest orator of the century. Above all he had what the ordinary man lacks: a projection of power that is still a mystery – the doctors will perhaps try to figure it out one day – that had some strange touch in it of the medium or the enchanter.

Whatever crowd he was addressing felt itself as though seized, transfixed. It reacted in turn to this projection of power, sending it back, thus establishing in the course of myriad tiny exchanges a current with the orator that was equally give and take.

You would have to have heard Hitler to understand this phenomenon, but it was the very basis of the conquest of the masses by the one man in the Reich who

possessed this sovereign gift. His words, his programs, his anger, his irony all were transported and transfigured in that projection that was like lightning. Tens of millions of Germans were affected by it, and were enlightened and inflamed by Hitler's fire.

By the time the cheering had died away, the hundreds of thousands of "non-Hitlerites" who had come to Tempelhof at the bidding of the Marxist Trade Union Federation were conquered just like the others, just like the SA men they had been fist-fighting for the past ten years.

The great human sea surged back from Tempelhof to Berlin. A million and a half people had come in perfect order, and they went back in perfect order. There were no bottlenecks to halt the cars and motor coaches. That rigorous yet joyful discipline of a contented people was in itself a source of wonder. Everything had gone off as smoothly as though on ball beatings.

The memory of that fabulous crowd thronging back down to the center of Berlin, the capital of the Reich, will never leave me. A great many were on foot. Their faces were now different faces, as though they had been invested with a strange and totally new life. The non-Germans in the crowd were as though stunned, and just as impressed as Hitler's fellow countrymen.

The French ambassador noted:

The foreigners on the speaker's platform as guests of honor were not alone in carrying away the impression of a truly beautiful and wonderful public festival, an impression that was created by the regime's genius for organization, by the nighttime display of uniforms, by the play of lights, the rhythm of the music, by the flags and the colorful fireworks; and they were not alone in thinking that a breath of reconciliation and unity was passing over the Third Reich. „It is our wish," Hitler had exclaimed, as though taking heaven as his witness, „to get along together and to struggle together as brothers, so that at the hour when we shall come before God, we might say to him: 'See, Lord, we have changed. The German people are no longer a people ashamed, a people mean and cowardly and divided. No, Lord! the German people have become strong in their spirit, in their will, in their perseverance, in their acceptance of any sacrifice. Lord, we remain faithful to Thee! Bless our struggle!' " [Francois-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une ambassade d'Bedin*, p.128).

Who else could have made such an incantatory appeal without making himself look ridiculous?

Nor had a politician ever spoken straight out with such faith and such force of

the rights of workers, or laid out in such clear terms the social plan he was going to carry out in behalf of the common people.

On the very next day the newspaper of the proletarian left, the *Union Journal*, describing the meeting in which at least two-thirds – a million – of those attending were workers, summed it up: „This May 1st was victory day.”

With this winning over of the workers, what further rhyme or reason was there in the thousands of Marxist cells that had for so long poisoned the social life of the Reich and which in any case had not exactly prevented anything or produced anything or built anything?

Things went forward for Hitler without a hitch. A few hours after that „victory” at the Tempelhof airfield, he was able quite peacefully to take over the control and complete direction of all the union organizations, of their premises, their enterprises, their banks. The time of Marxist anarchy was at an end, and a single union organization would henceforth embody the collective will of all the workers of the Reich.

„This government,” Hitler had proclaimed, „is a government of the people,” At any rate he was in the process of making it become so in great strides.

Hitler knew very well that all was not yet won, that Moscow in particular would not drop her guard – or her guns. It would take more than words. It would take some accomplishments. That and only that would make the winning over of the proletariat something more than the enthusiasm shown at meetings, would make it lasting.

How would Hitler be able to solve the problem that no one else previously had been able to solve, either in Germany or outside of Germany: putting the six million unemployed back to work?

What would he do about such things as wages? Working hours? Leisure time? Housing? How would he succeed, in law and in fact, in making the rights and the dignity of the worker be respected at long last?

How would the very condition of men’s lives be materially, morally, and one might even say spiritually transformed? How would men’s lives be enlarged within a new society freed of the inertia, injustices and prejudices of the past?

„National Socialism,” Adolf Hitler had declared from the start, „has its mission and its hour; it is not just a passing movement but a phase of history.”.

Having now in his hands the real instruments of true power – an authoritarian state of regions solidly welded together with the body of the country – Hitler had promptly shaken himself free of any tutelage of the old impotent political parties. He was directing and inspiring a cohesive labor force that was no longer split into a thousand rivulets but running in an unstoppable stream.

Hitler was sure of himself, of the force of his own strength of conviction. He did not intend to resort to the use of physical force, but rather to conquer morally, one by one, the millions of Germans who were still his adversaries from the previous year or who even hated him.

For years he had carefully paved the way for his conquest. He had likewise decided on every detail of the transformation of the state, not only with respect to unification of the administrative structures, but looking beyond to the stages of realization of each point of his social program.

He would induce even the most refractory to go along with him. Long before he had said: „The hour will come when the 15 million people who now hate us will be solidly behind us and will acclaim with us the new revival we shall create together.”

The army of converts was already forming its ranks.

Historian Joachim Fest was compelled to admit the fact without beating about the bush or quibbling: „Hitler rapidly acquired the legitimate character of a statesman who inspired respect and merited more than the sneering name of demagogue. Those who resisted the desire to support him that was spreading like an epidemic formed an ever smaller minority (*Ibid.*, p. 42).“

What a historical tribute!

Even a left-wing writer like Kurt Tucholsky, sensing that the tide was sweeping everything away, acknowledged it in these vivid terms: „You can't tell the ocean to go away.”

However, things were still in a partially negative stage.

Primarily what Hitler had done was to clear the way. Now the fully positive period was awaited.

„From now on,” Hitler had asserted in the Reichstag, „We National Socialists are going to open the way for the worker to obtain what he requires.”

Would Hitler, too, like so many others who had failed before him, or would fail

after him, find this too tough a nut to crack?

The great tragedy of unemployment in particular was the number one concern of the entire country. It was an obstacle blocking the way for the proletariat like a new stone of Sisyphus.

Would Hitler be able to face up to this nagging problem upon which the entire social future of the German people depended? Above all, would he be able to resolve the problem?

CHAPTER 13

WHERE TO FIND THE BILLIONS

When Hitler, silent and preoccupied, stood at his Chancellery window on the night of Jan. 30, 1933 receiving the cheers of the crowd, he had been seized with anxiety, and not without reason. Dr. Schacht has related, „I had the impression that he was a man fairly crushed by the weight of the responsibility he was taking on..., That profound emotional upheaval of which I was a witness could not possibly have been mere play-acting: It betrayed true feelings.” (Hjalmar Schacht, *Memoires d'un magiden*, vol. II, p. 52).

But Hitler was a man capable of surmounting that emotion and leaving it behind him. Faced with a particularly agonizing national tragedy – immense unemployment, general misery, almost total industrial stagnation – that no other politician of any party had been able even to ameliorate, and which on the contrary the country had seen grow ever more grim, this leader of the German revolution was a man of purpose and will.

Hitler had no sooner been voted the plenary powers than he rolled up his shirtsleeves and began to carry out plans which he had long since laid out and matured.

Unlike all the other responsible – or irresponsible – politicians of 20th- century Europe, Hitler did not believe that fighting for the economic health of his country consisted in impassively swallowing one reverse after another, standing idly by while the nation's industries were dying, or watching millions of unemployed workers tramp the narrow streets in swarms.

For the acting politicians of the democracies, there had been only one recommended solution: a drastic reduction in expenditures. Not only in those of the state but in those required for private investment as well. Tighten your belt, Let go of your pennies one by one!

Thus it was that the Germany before Hitler had cut salaries by 25 percent, limited payment of unemployment benefits to six months, and reduced by five-sixths the total amount of private investments.

The country's standard of living had collapsed like a balloon. At the end of six months the unemployed obviously had not found new employment. And they were joined by long lines of new unemployed.

Deprived of all means of subsistence, they gravitated to the welfare offices.

People spent less and less, with the ineluctable consequence that the industries producing goods for consumption closed their doors one after another for lack of orders, thereby sending thousands more unemployed into the streets, in 1932, Germany's industries were languishing, with production reduced by half.

Private investments had fallen to a discouraging level: barely 500 million marks per year instead of the normal 3 billion. No new blood had been injected into the industrial system, no workplaces modernized.

The government no longer had any money available. Fiscal receipts had fallen to 10 billion marks, while the meager and short-term unemployment benefits alone absorbed two-thirds of the total. The situation deteriorated more and more, with no solution possible so long as the government persisted in its policies of fence-sitting, timidity and fear.

What was needed was not waiting for an indefinite time for the economic machinery to be put back in operation thanks to Unproved fiscal receipts resulting from a highly problematical business recovery; what was needed was to bring about a renewal of activity by dint of boldness and by investments which would be created from the ground up using imagination and decision.

And that, Hitler had long understood.

You could combat unemployment, eliminate it, only by giving industry the financial means to start up anew, to modernize, and in the process to create millions of new jobs.

You would not reestablish the normal rate of consumption, let alone increase it, unless you put an end to the starvation-level allowances that made purchases of any kind a virtual impossibility. On the contrary, it was going to be necessary to step up production and sales because of the return to work – whether in factories or offices or banks – of the six million unemployed who would thereupon become six million purchasers.

The only way to get over the stage of economic slump was by putting industry in step with the times and by stimulating the invention of new products.

For example, Germany had no gasoline. It was necessary to increase the national production of synthetic gasoline to the maximum. The technique had been discovered, but it needed to be exploited on the greatest possible scale.

The same applied to natural rubber. Germany possessed a splendid substitute in „buna“ (polymerized butadiene). Plans for all-out manufacturing of it, however, were still sitting in the file cabinets.

For every hundred products invented, scarcely one got beyond the dust of administrative files. Moreover one could and should at all cost stimulate new kinds of labor and industrial activity by carrying out great public works projects.

Germany's roads were mediocre; it was essential to improve them, and above all to mark out, like great lifelines all across the Reich, millions of kilometers of highways that would rapidly be productive and bring about the exchange and consumption of goods, while at the same time aiding communication among Germans hitherto withdrawn in their separate regions.

Highways would also mean cars. Germany was at the bottom of the list in the production of automobiles. Five times less than that of the French!

Ten years prior to 1933, while in his Landsberg prison cell, Hitler had already had the conception of a formidable system of highways. He had conceived and himself designed the little popular car that would travel them. It would be called the „Volkswagen.“ He had even gone so far as to determine its outline: „The new car should have the shape of a June bug. One needs only to look at nature to obtain aerodynamic lines.“

Up until 1933, a car was a privilege of the rich. It was not within the reach financially of the middle class, much less of the workingman. The „Volkswagen,“ costing ten times less than the motorized coaches of earlier years, would become a popular work tool, a source of pleasure after work, a means of unwinding, of getting some fresh air, and of discovering, thanks to the new highways, a magnificent country that was virtually unknown to the German worker.

Hitler meant from the beginning for that economical car to be built by the millions. And from it came the creation of a new industry, a very considerable creation which would inevitably become one of the greatest centers of the economic life and one of the largest employers of manpower in the new Reich.

Plans for the construction of popular housing developments, or of grandiose public buildings, had also been completed by Hitler, drawing pencil in hand, during the period of his imprisonment.

We still have rough sketches ranging from groups of individual worker's houses with their own gardens – hundreds of thousands of them would be built – to a plan for a covered stadium in Berlin dedicated to public use. And even a hall of

congress, unlike any other in the world, that would symbolize the grandeur of the National Socialist revolution.

„A building with a monumental dome,” Werner Maser explained in one of his books, „the plan of which he drew while he was writing *Mein Kampf*, having a span of 46 meters, a height of 220 meters, a diameter of 250 meters, and with a capacity of 150,000 to 190,000 people standing. The interior of the building would have been 17 times larger than Saint Peters Church in Rome.”

„That hall,” Reich Minister and architect Albert Speer gave his assurance, „was not just an idle dream impossible of achievement”.

Hitler’s imagination had thus been teeming with many projects for a long time. And with plans that were to be realized as well.

There were entrepreneurs, managers and technicians available. Hitler was not going to improvise.

The historian Werner Maser, although quite anti-Hitler, like nearly all of his colleagues – how else would they have found publishers? – has acknowledged:

„From the beginning of his political career, he [Hitler] took great pains systematically to arrange for whatever he was going to need in order to carry out his plans.”

„Hitler was distinguished,” Maser added, „by an exceptional intelligence in technical matters.”

Hitler had acquired his technical knowledge by devoting many thousands of hours of study to it from the time of his youth.

„Hitler read an endless number of books,” explained Dr. Hjalmar Schacht „He acquired a very considerable amount of knowledge and made masterful use of it in discussions and speeches. In certain respects he was a man endowed with genius. He had ideas that no one else would ever have thought of, ideas that resulted in the ending of great difficulties, sometimes by measures of an astonishing simplicity or brutality.”

This was confirmed by the former minister, Albert Speer, before the Nuremberg Tribunal:

„Hitler’s dictatorship was the first to make flawless use of all technical means in order to exercise domination over the people.”

It was still imperative to find many billions of marks if they were to get started on the great socioeconomic revolution that was destined, as Hitler had always intended, to make Germany once again the leader in Europe in industry and commerce and, especially, to wipe out unemployment in Germany completely in the immediate future.

But where were they to pick up the indispensable billions?

Where and how were they to allot the money in order to ensure one hundred percent effectiveness for the investment?

Hitler was by no means a dictator in matters of the economy, but a stimulator. His government would do only that which private initiative would not be able to do.

He believed in the dynamism of the individual imagination, in the creative spirit, in the need for every superior being to assume responsibilities.

He also admitted that profit was the great motivator. Without the prospect of seeing his efforts rewarded, the dynamic man simply refrained from running risks. The economic failure of Communism established that. In the absence of personal incentives, Soviet industry always lagged behind all its competitors by twenty or thirty years, so driven to grappling on all sides with plans and projects and ideas that Russian brains, never rewarded, no longer wore themselves out with creating any more than manufacturers did with developing.

Even the elite worker became discouraged in the USSR, treated as he was like a dehumanized robot and afforded no possibility of bettering himself financially, no matter what discoveries might spring from his inventive mind. The monopoly of the state means the death of all initiative and hence of all progress.

For all men generously to pool all their profits would be marvelous.

But that is not the way of the world. Every man desires that his labor shall improve his own personal condition and that his brain, his creative imagination and his persistence in research may all collect their reward.

For not baling taken that psychological evidence into account, Communism in the USSR, right up to the final days of 1990, has always wallowed in mediocrity, notwithstanding that its immense reservoir of manpower, its almost infinite material possibilities and the bounteous range of its raw materials ought to have ensured it a natural supremacy. Hitler was always averse to the idea of labor under state control. He believed in elites.

„A single idea of genius,” he used to say, „has more value than a lifetime of conscientious labor in an office.”

There is an industrial elite just as there are political or intellectual elites. A manufacturer of great ability should not be restrained, hunted down by the revenue services like a criminal, nor should he remain unappreciated. On the contrary, it is important for the economic development of a country that he be encouraged morally and materially with the greatest possible zeal.

The most fruitful initiatives Hitler would take from 1933 on would be in favor of private industries. He would keep an eye on the quality of their directors, to be sure, and would shunt aside the incompetents, quite a few of them at times, but he would give support to the best ones, those with the keenest minds, the most imaginative, the boldest ones, even if their political opinions did not agree with his own.

„There is no question,” he stated very firmly, „of dismissing a factory owner or director under the pretext that he is not a National Socialist ”

Hitler would exercise the same moderation, the same pragmatism, in the administrative as well as in the industrial sphere.

What he demanded of his coworkers first of all was competence, *effectiveness*. The great majority of the functionaries of the Third Reich – 80 percent of them – were never enrolled in the National Socialist Party. Several of Hitler’s ministers, like Baron Constantin von Neurath and Johann Indwig von Krosigk, and important diplomatic emissaries of the Reich to Prague, Vienna and Ankara were never Nazis in the least. But they were capable.

Hitler kept an eye on someone like Franz von Papen, who was both intelligent and clever, but he made use of him and even knew how to pay homage to him.

Similarly he did not hesitate to keep men heading up the chancellor’s office who were very competent workers chosen by his predecessors, men such as Secretary of State Hans Otto Meissner, who had served all the preceding chancellors, whether socialist or conservative, and who had done everything in his power right up to the last minute to torpedo the Führer’s accession to power.

Meissner knew his business. Hitler wisely had him resume his place as if he had been an associate from the old heroic days. Stiff and formal in manner and faithfully sticking to his master, for twelve years he would be an efficient majordomo who would remove all the thorns from the stents of the roses before Hitler brought them up to his nose.

The most remarkable case of such a utilization of talent was that of Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, the most discerning and most competent of the financiers of the Reich in 1933.

A supporter of Hitler? By no means! He never was and never had been a supporter of anyone but Schacht. But technically he was the best in the business. For getting the economic recovery of the Reich under way he had no equal.

Ten years earlier, at the end of 1923, Schacht had saved the Weimar Republic financially by inventing the „Rentenmark. “ He was crafty and imaginative and therefore capable of understanding the boldest of Hitler’s plans and of helping him carry them out.

His personal ambition was immense – another reason for Hitler to give him every possibility to rise as high as he would. Hitler was going to make him straightaway his president of the Reichsbank, then his commissioner for economic affairs with the rank of Cabinet minister. A member of the Cabinet! He was entirely happy.

Was it dangerous? Of course! Doubly so inasmuch as Schacht was a capitalist to the core, with close ties to high foreign banking interests, most especially with Jewish financiers of London and New York, and knew nothing of the revolutionary doctrines of someone like Hitler, who favored the social preeminence of labor, the true creator of the nation’s life.

Schacht was never permitted to intervene in political matters. Hitler would ask him to devise some new methods for coming up with the necessary marks for what he intended to do. That was a lot, but it was all. His collaboration would never go any further. It would cease when the financial formulas of the clever Dr. Schacht had served their time.

Schacht would muse a seething, bitter hatted at. his dismissal. But for five years, Hitler, watching him closely the while, made full use of him.

Bent on getting billions of marks as quickly as possible and any way he could, Hitler summoned the president of the Reichsbank, Doctor [Hans] Luther, to his office early in February of 1933. Doctor Luther, appointed to his post by the former administration, was a man enamored of old-fashioned ideas of extreme prudence in the management of the state’s money. He was all the more reserved because the state coffers were all but. empty. His detachable collar, stiff as a calling card, spoke for the rigidity of his principles, He belonged to the old school of accountants who spend four sous only when they have four sous.

Hitler was quite well aware that this worthy man was unhappily presiding over a bank lacking in funds. However, it was not to have him empty the state treasury that he had summoned Luther, but to have him come up with some new means of creating a war chest that would allow the German economy to get back on its feet and the unemployment to vanish.

It was a question of imagination. But Luther's brain was not a volcano of new ideas; it was an abacus.

„How much money,” Hitler asked him, „can you put at my disposal for creating jobs?”

Luther did not answer immediately. He had stalled his abacus going. When he had mentally completed the arithmetic operation, he gave his response as though he were speaking to the director of a financial consortium.

„One hundred and fifty million.”

It was an eloquent figure. It indicated just how completely Hitler's predecessors and their colleagues were lacking in any idea of how to save the Reich or of the financial means the operation would require. One hundred and fifty million, when the German government poured a billion marks into a bottomless pit every three months in unemployment benefits alone!

With only 150 million marks they would have been hard put to grant even three or four marks a day to five or six or seven million of the unemployed for one short week. And they did not even know the exact number of the unemployed since there were so many who drew no benefit at all.

But all that meant was that the worthy man had never been asked the question before. And that no leader of the Reich before Hitler had ever concerned himself with finding out how to raise the funds that would be indispensably required to carry out any real plan for putting Germany back to work.

Doctor Luther, accordingly, would be a totally ineffective financier if Hitler wished to push on with his project.

Then he thought of Schacht, the old brown fox. He always had his hat full of rabbits. Hitler was going to have him take them out.

„Heir Schacht,” he said, „we are assuredly in agreement on one point: no other single task facing the government at the moment can be so truly urgent as conquering unemployment. That will take a lot of money. Do you see any possibility

of finding it apart from the Reichsbank?"

After a moment he added: „How much would it take? Do you have any idea?"

Wishing to win Schacht over by appealing to his ambition, Hitler smiled and asked:

„Would you be willing to take over direction of the Reichsbank again?"

Schacht simpered an answer to the effect that he had a tender heart and did not wish to hurt the feelings of the incumbent Dr. Luther. Hitler, playing the game, reassured him: he would find a new job for Dr. Luther somewhere else.

Schacht pricked up his ears, straightened himself up in his detachable collar, and trained his big round eyes on Hitler.

„Well, if that's the way it is, then I am ready to assume the presidency of the Reichsbank again. "

There it was. His great dream was realized! Schacht had been president of the Reichsbank before, in 1924; he had been sacked, and now he would go back in triumph. He felt vindicated. And the solution to the problem was going to burst forth from his inventive brain that same month.

„It was necessary," Schacht later explained, „to discover a method that would avoid inflating the investment holdings of the Reichsbank immoderately and consequently increasing the circulation of money excessively.

„Therefore," he added, „I had to find some means of getting the sums that were lying idle in pockets and banks, without meaning for it to be long term and without having it undergo the risk of depreciation. That was the reasoning behind the Mefo Bonds." (Schacht, *ibid.*, pp. 69f).

What did „Mefo" signify? Mefo was a contraction of the name *Metallforschungs A.G.* (Metals Research Co).

These metals were all the more special as the company that was going to start the billions moving was a very small one: capital of only a million marks.

But Hitler had managed to have it funded – and covered – by the four largest trusts in Germany: Krupp, Siemens, Rheinstahl and Gutehoffnungshütte.

Moreover, the Reich stood surety for all future commitments, and the financial

cover was thus complete.

Enterprises, old or new, that started to work to fill orders placed by the government had only to draw drafts on Mefo for the amounts due. These drafts, when presented at the wickets of the Reichsbank, could be converted into cash immediately if so desired. But the success of the operation depended entirely on public acceptance of the Mefo bonds. The wily Schacht had foreseen the whole thing. Since Mefo bonds were short-term bonds which could be cashed in at any time, the risk in buying or accepting them – or in holding them – was nil. They bore an interest of 4 percent – a quite acceptable figure in those days – whereas bank notes hidden under the mattress of course earned absolutely nothing. The public added it all up and went for it in a big way.

While the Reichsbank had been able to draw on its treasury for only a miserable 150 million marks in support of Hitler's war on unemployment, 12 billion marks worth of Mefo bonds were subscribed for by the German public in four years!

That enormous reserve fund would make everything possible.

Those billions, the golden fruit of the combined imagination, ingenuity and astuteness of Hitler and Schacht, would do away with the shilly-shallying of the torpid and fundamentally fearful conservatism of the bankers.

Right at the start, Schacht was able to place a credit of a billion marks at the disposal of the Reich.

A little later he added another credit of 600 million in order to permit a start to be made on Hitler's grand plans for highway construction. That would provide work for 100,000 of the unemployed immediately and thereafter, directly and indirectly, would mean the assurance of wages for some 500,000 persons.

It was an enormous outlay but one immediately offset by the elimination of unemployment benefits and by the additional taxes received as a result of the increase in living standard – i.e., spending – of the newly employed. In a few months, thanks to the Mefo bonds, which gave support to the private economy once again and prodded it increasingly to assume risks and expand, reemployment in Germany would take on gigantic proportions.

And what part did Schacht personally play in this extraordinary turnaround in the situation?

Schacht gave his own answer when he was vehemently reproached at the Nuremberg trials for having made the revival of the Reich possible by his financial

initiatives.

„I don't think Hitler was reduced to begging my help. If I had not served him, he would have found other methods, other means. He was not a man to give up. It's easy enough for you to say, Mr. Prosecutor, that I should have watched Hitler the and not lifted a finger. But the entire working class would have died with him!”

Even the Marxists were quick to recognize that Hitler was making a success of something they had never had the energy to undertake.

The admission was made in June of 1934 by the *Zeitschrift für Sozialismus*, the newspaper of the German Social-Democrats who were paying for their incapacity in exile:

Faced with the despair of proletarians reduced to joblessness, of young people with diplomas and a future closed to them, of the middle classes of merchants and artisans condemned to bankruptcy and of farmers terribly threatened by the collapse in agricultural prices, we all failed. We weren't capable of offering the masses anything but speeches about the glory of socialism.

Hitler, without waiting even a day, had undertaken to transform his speeches into deeds.

And now that billions of marks were within his reach, thanks to his persistence and imagination, how was Hitler going to carry his economic and social recovery programs through to success in the middle of the crash just a few months ahead?



Hitler unveils the Volkswagen, or „people’s car,” which he had designed in 1932. One of Hitler’s focuses in office was the improvement of the life of the German worker, and the development of a car that average Germans could afford was an important aspect of that program. In this, Hitler had been inspired by American Henry Ford, whose Ford Motor Company had been created with a similar mission.

CHAPTER 14

HITLER'S SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Hitler's tremendous social achievement in putting Germany's 6 million unemployed back to work is never spoken of any longer. In fact, since 1945, not a single serious study has been devoted to that nonetheless highly interesting phenomenon. The reincorporation of six million unemployed back into the economic system of a country is more than a current event. Yet the „democratic“ historians dispose of that unparalleled achievement in just a few lines.

Similarly, practically no reference is made to the whole body of reforms that totally changed the condition of the working man in Germany: the transformation of factories that were previously gloomy caverns into spacious and healthy work centers, with natural lighting, surrounding gardens and playing fields; the building of hundreds of thousands of houses for workers; the several weeks of paid leave, as well as leisure time and vacation trips by land and sea; Volkswagens at a cost of less than a mark per day; physical and cultural education for young workers, also technical training; and the most modern and complete social security/ pension system in all of Europe at the time.

That subject is one that is hushed up as quickly as possible, because it is embarrassing. The reader might be able to say to himself – who knows? – that Hitler was perhaps the greatest social achiever of the 20th century, an intolerable view to begin with!

However, it is a very important and in fact essential part of the work of Adolf Hitler. But since realization of those things might make us actually want to take our hats off to him, we are wary; we skip it; we remain silent and play dead.

In general, when it comes to Hitler, historians all act like Manichaeans, seeing things as straight black or white, clothed in hypocrisy and eyes trained solely in the direction most pleasing to their readers, who have already long since gone astray.

However, giving back work and bread to millions of unemployed who had been dragging out their lives in misery for years; almost totally restructuring industrial life and creating an entirely new setup for labor virtually out of thin air; conceiving and achieving a nationwide organization for the defense and betterment of seventeen million wage earners (twenty million in a few years); creating *ex cathedra* - a new magistrature charged with guaranteeing the rights of, and calling attention to the duties of, all members of the social community: that organic body of reforms

represented the execution of a gigantic plan.

It had been conceived and prepared by Hitler well in advance. Without it the country would have collapsed into anarchy. And it was all-inclusive: from the industrial recovery to the construction of an inn alongside an autobahn.

It took the French Revolution several years to set up a stable social structure. The Soviets, still longer. Five years after the Communist revolution of 1917, hundreds of thousands of Russians were still dying of misery and hunger, in Germany, in just a few months, the great machinery was in motion, with organization and realization coming together immediately.

The single fact of undertaking the construction of a highway system almost without equal in the world might by itself have kept a government occupied for years. It was necessary to have studied the problem beforehand and, with due regard for the needs of the population and the economy, to set the dimensions of the highway system destined to give Germany a new lease on life.

Hitler, as always, had been very farsighted. The width of the concrete lanes would be 24 meters. There would be hundreds of bridges of large span. In order to harmonize the modern work with the natural site, a great deal of natural rock would be used.

The artistically drawn curved lines came together and separated as though they were living constructions. They were marked out with gas stations and inns, all built in conformity with local styles.

The original plan had called for 7,000 kilometers of roadway. It would later be increased to 10,000, then to 11,000 kilometers when Austria was reunited with Germany.

The Second World War would shatter this great modernization effort of the Reich, but what was created remains as a deathless testimony to a man and an era.

The financial boldness equaled the technical boldness. Those expressways would ultimately be free of charge. That seemed an anomaly to the cashiers, but the return quickly proved to be considerable, given the savings in time and material and the marked increase in travel – hence also the expenditures of those using the roads – which is to say an increase as well in receipts from taxes, notably on gasoline.

Germany thus bestowed upon herself a unique means to economic prosperity. Enormously increased transport facilities. The development of hundreds of new industries along these ribbons of road. Elimination of congestion on secondary roads.

Travel and intercommunication by hundreds of thousands of tourists, or of producers and customers, in search of new economic possibilities.

Even the expenditures in labor costs brought some very interesting compensations: they eliminated unemployment benefits (25 percent of the total amount of wages). The 100,000 and later 150,000 workers deployed along the expressways under construction had the additional 75 percent, which they spent, and those expenditures in turn meant increased tax revenues for the government.

Can you imagine the problems, even before the first breaking of ground, posed by the mobilization of those hundreds of thousands of workers: through often uninhabited regions, in marshy areas, in the shadow of Alpine peaks?

For 150,000 men to leave their homes and go camping in rough terrain was hard enough. But it was also necessary at the outset to ensure tolerable living conditions for the columns of workers who accepted such an uprooting for the sake of gaining a livelihood.

In France it is unthinkable for an unemployed person to move twenty kilometers for the sake of finding a new job. He wants to stay glued to his native village, his garden, the cafe on the corner.

The Germans are fundamentally hard-working people. In 1933, they were tired of being useless. Pouring concrete, using a pick, or whatever, they would put dignity back in their lives.

No one balked at the inconvenience, the absence from home or traveling a long way. The will to live the life of an effective man again outweighed all secondary considerations.

Still, it was desired that the worker keep up his spirits, that he not feel isolated or that he was being used as a mere tool.

The efforts made to bring him material comforts, to provide entertainment and instruction, were immediate and massive. The world had never seen its like before in any great construction project whatsoever. The workers felt that they were again being treated as human beings with bodies to be satisfied, hearts to be comforted, and brains to be enlightened.

It had been necessary to organize the transportation and housing of these masses of workers methodically, to set up construction camps, supply bases, and recreation facilities for them, all while moving ahead in step with the roads – and to provide this transient population with wholesome amusements, and cultural training

as well. Fourteen mobile movie crews traveled along with them from one construction site to the next. And always and everywhere labor was honored and celebrated.

It was always like that in the Third Reich. The great popular demonstrations, whether by workers or by country people, were masterpieces of both magnificence and good taste. No foreign spectator, however mulish, could fail to appreciate that.

Hitler was quickly able to open the first section of the Autobahn, from Frankfurt-am-Main to Darmstadt. He had taken with him on the occasion, in his private car, the manufacturer of the billions, Doctor Schacht, who was beaming like the July Sun and puffed up like a balloon.

The official procession moved ahead three cars abreast in the van, then by six, transforming the Autobahn into a one-way road.

It was a far cry from the donkey roads of the none-too-distant past, when we considered ourselves well-to-do to be riding a bicycle.

The plan to build thousands of low-cost homes had also called for a vast mobilization of manpower.

Hitler had envisioned housing that would be beautiful, cozy and on a grand scale. He didn't intend to house the German people as his predecessors had, in rabbit warrens. Those great barracks filled with human beings on the outskirts of labor towns filled him with horror. Most of the houses he designed were single-story detached dwellings, with a small garden where the kids could romp, the wife could gather a few salad greens, and the man could read his newspaper in peace after his day's work. These single-family homes were also built in the architectural style of the various regions, all so different and charming in Germany.

When there was no alternative to creating large complexes, Hitler saw to it that they were always airy and made more beautiful with large garden areas where the children could play without being in any danger.

All housing was equipped to observe high standards of hygiene, something almost always lacking in earlier working-class lodgings.

Loans amortizable in ten years were granted to newly married couples who wished to settle permanently in their homes. At the birth of each child, a fourth of the debt was canceled. Four children at the normal rate of a new arrival every two years and a half, and the family had no more payments to make.

I expressed my astonishment at this to Hitler one day.

„But then, you never get back the total amount of your loans?“

„How so?“ he replied, smiling. „Over a period of ten years, a family with four children brings in much more than our loans in the taxes levied on a hundred different items of consumption.“

Every year tax revenues increased proportionately with the increase in the cost of Hitler's social programs. Tax returns quite naturally tripled in a few years.

There was never a financial crisis in Hitler's Germany.

In order to stimulate the economy, it was necessary to have the nerve, as Hitler had, to invest money that the government did not really have, rather than wait with folded arms and an empty head for the economy to revive by itself before any investments were made.

Our whole era is dying economically because of our yielding to fearful hesitation. Enrichment follows investment, not the other way around.

Since Hitler, it is only someone like Ronald Reagan who has seemed to understand this. When he became president, he understood how to get the United States prospering again by boldly stimulating the economy with loans and a drastic reduction in taxes, not waiting for it to come out of its stagnation on its own.

A brain inspired is worth a thousand tons of gold. And the gold will follow when the brain takes the lead.

Before the end of 1933 even, Hitler had succeeded in building 202,119 model housing units, in four years he would provide the German people with 1,458,128 new dwellings, almost a million and a half!

Workers would no longer be exploited as in the days of the construction pirates. A month's rent for a worker could not exceed 26 marks, that is to say, about an eighth of normal wages in those times. Or 45 marks maximum for an employee with a more substantial salary.

Equally effective social measures were taken on behalf of the farmers who had the lowest incomes. In 1933 alone 17,611 new farm houses were completed, each of them surrounded by a parcel of land 1,000 meters square. In three years Hitler would build 91,000 such farmhouses. The rental for such a dwelling could in no case exceed a modest share of the farmer's income.

That allotment of land and housing, available to all, would be but one stage of the revolution that in the very near future was going to transform the life of the Reich's rural population.

These very considerable undertakings, which rapidly restored bread and pride to hundreds of thousands of workers, had triggered a general competition, and another 100,000 workers had found employment in repairing the secondary roads. As many others again had been hired to work on canals, dams, drainage and irrigation projects, thereby making fertile again some of the most barren regions of the Reich.

Industries everywhere were hiring again. Some of them, like Krupp and I.G. Farben, or the big automobile manufacturers, on a very large scale. With the country becoming more prosperous, car sales had shown an increase of more than 80,000 units in 1933. At the same time employment in the auto industry had doubled. All Germany was getting into full production, with private industry leading the way.

The new government was giving them every assistance because they were the creators of employment Hitler had almost immediately made available to them a reserve fund of 500 million marks – the invented marks – while seeing to it that incompetent and indecisive persons in administrative posts were eliminated without any ifs, ands or buts.

The start-up assistance given to the best of them would in no way be lost. And supplementing this preliminary support, another two billion marks would be loaned to the most enterprising factory owners. Nearly half of these billions would go into new wages and salaries, thus removing the burden from the state of three hundred million marks in unemployment benefits. Add to that the hundreds of millions in taxes deriving from the business recovery and from the enormous amount of restored wages, as well as from the widespread manufacture of new products, and the state had back its investment and then some.

Hitler's entire economic policy would be based on those calculations. Risk very large amounts to undertake great public works and to spur the renewal and modernization of industry, then later recover the billions invested through invisible and painless tax revenues.

Hitler invented that recovery formula, and in a very short time Germany commenced to see the results of it.

These very important economic reforms were not, however, Hitler's only objective.

All the time he was organizing the reemployment of Germany's workers, it was his intention that the workers themselves should in future be powerfully enough organized to resist the pressures of a capitalism that was often insatiable and that up to that point in time had given little thought to the existence of the community.

He would impose his own conception of the social community on all of them: that the most powerful boss and the lowliest worker were components together of an indissoluble reality. Only their collaboration in loyalty and justice could ensure the prosperity of the different elements of the society.

Marxism, by setting them against each other, had failed and had brought Germany's economy to the point of collapse. The workers had come to understand that and had deserted their demagogic unions *en masse*, recognizing them as promoters of constant conflicts which in ruining the factories ruined the workers as well.

Besides, by the end of 1932 the discredited unions were drowning in debt: three billion marks, at an interest of 10 percent, which they would never be able to pay. Despite that, some of the Marxist leaders, sensing that shipwreck was about to sink their foundering vessel, had engaged in sensational malversations: 600,000 marks had been embezzled in recent months.

The Marxist leaders had failed: socially, financially and morally.

Every activity requires someone in charge. The natural head of a factory is the man responsible for it. He is the one who has to be the motivator of common activity, but only on the condition that he is both a capable director and concerned about social justice. An industrialist in the new Germany who was not would forfeit his leadership role. There were many such dismissals under Hitler.

A considerable number of guarantees protected the worker against any abuse of authority. Their specific purpose was to see that the rights of workers were respected and that workers were treated as worthy collaborators, not just as factory tools. Every industrialist was obliged, with the collaboration of worker delegates, to draft uniform and impersonal shop regulations that were not imposed from above but adapted to each factory and its particular working conditions. The regulations had to indicate „the length of the working day, the time and method of paying wages, and the safety rules, and to be posted throughout the factory,” readily available both to the worker whose interests might be endangered and to the owner or manager whose orders might be subverted.

The thousands of different versions of such regulations served to create a healthy rivalry, with every factory group wanting to outdo the others in justice and

efficiency.

One of the first reforms to benefit German workers was the establishment of paid vacations.

The French Popular Front, in 1936, would make a show of having invented paid vacations – and stingily at that, only one week per year; but Hitler had established them, and two or three times as generously, from the first month of his coming to power in 1933.

Every factory employee from then on would have the legal right to a paid vacation.

Until then in Germany, paid vacations did not exceed four or five days, and nearly half of the younger workers had no vacation time at all. Hitler on the other hand favored the younger workers; vacations were not handed out blindly, and the youngest workers were granted them more generously. It was a humane action: a young person has more need of rest and fresh air for the development of his strength and vigor just coming into maturity. So they had the benefit of 18 days per year of paid vacation.

These figures, to be sure, have perhaps now been surpassed, a half century after Hitler, but in their day, in 1933, they far exceeded the European norms.

Basic vacation time was twelve days. Then, from the age of 25 on, it went up to 18 days. After 10 years with the company, workers got a still longer vacation: 21 days, three times what the French socialists would grant the workers of their country in 1936.

As for overtime hours, they no longer were paid, as they were every-where else in Europe at that time, at just the regular hourly rate. The work day itself had been reduced to a tolerable norm of a little less than eight hours, thus the 40-hour week in Europe was created by Adolf Hitler. And beyond that legal limit, each additional hour had to be paid at a considerably increased rate.

As another innovation, work breaks were made longer: two hours every day in order to allow workers to relax and to make use of the playing fields that the large industries were required to provide.

Dismissal of an employee was no longer left as before to the sole discretion of the employer.

In that era, workers' rights to job security was nonexistent.

Hitler saw to it that those rights were strictly spelled out. The employer had to announce any dismissal four weeks in advance. The employee then had a period of up to two months in which to lodge a protest the dismissal could also be annulled by the „Honor of Work Tribunal.”

What was the „Honor of Work Tribunal”? It was one of three great elements of protection and defense that were going to be of benefit to every German worker. The first was the Council of Trust The second was the Labor Commission. The third, the Tribunal of Social Honor.

The Council of Trust was charged with attending to the establishment and the development of a real community spirit between management and labor.

„In any business enterprise,” the law stated, „the employer and head of the enterprise [Führer], the employees and workers, personnel of the enterprise, shall work jointly towards the goal of the enterprise and the common good of the nation.”

Neither would any longer be the victim of the other – not the worker facing the arbitrariness of the employer, nor the employer facing the blackmail of strikes for political purposes.

Article 35 of the law stated: „Every member of an enterprise community shall assume the responsibility required by his position in said common enterprise.”

In short, at the head of the enterprise there would be a living, breathing executive in charge, but not moneybags with unconditional power.

„The interest of the community may require that an incapable or unworthy employer may be relieved of his duties.”

The employer would no longer be inaccessible and all-powerful, authoritatively determining the conditions of hiring and firing of his staff. He, too, would be subject to the workshop regulations, which he would have to respect, exactly as the least of his employees. The law conferred honor and the responsibility of authority on the employer only insofar as he merited it.

Every business enterprise of 20 or more persons was to have its „Council of Thrust” the two to 10 members of this council would be chosen from among the staff by the head of the enterprise.

The ordinance of application of March 10, 1934 of the above law further stated:

„The staff shall be called upon to decide for or against the established list in a

secret vote, and all salaried employees, including apprentices of 21 years of age or older, will take part in the vote. Voting is done by putting a number before the names of the candidates in order of preference, or by striking out certain names."

In contrast to the business councils of the preceding regime, the Council of Trust was no longer an instrument of class, but one of teamwork of the classes, composed of delegates of the staff as well as of the head of the enterprise.

The one could no longer act without the other. Compelled to coordinate their interests, though formerly rivals, they would now cooperate to establish by mutual consent the regulations which were to determine working conditions.

„The Council has the duty to develop mutual trust within the enterprise. It will advise on all measures serving to improve the carrying out of the work of the enterprise and on standards relating to general work conditions, in particular those which concern measures tending to reinforce feelings of solidarity between the members themselves and between the members and the enterprise, or tending to improve the personal situation of the members of the enterprise community. The Council also has the obligation to intervene to settle disputes. It must be heard before the imposition of fines based on workshop regulations." (Marcel Laloire, *op. tit.*, p. 48).

Before assuming their duties, members of the Work Council had to take an oath before all their coworkers to „carry out their duties only for the good of the enterprise and of all citizens, setting aside any personal interest, and in their behavior and manner of living to serve as model representatives of the enterprise." (Art 10, paragraph 1 of the law).

Every 30th of April, on the eve of the great national labor holiday, council duties ceased and the councils were renewed, pruning out conservatism or petrification and cutting short the arrogance of dignitaries who might have thought themselves beyond criticism.

It was up to the enterprise itself to pay a salary to members of the Council of Trust, just as if they were employed in the work area, and to „assume all costs resulting from the regular fulfillment of the duties of the Council."

The second agency that would ensure the orderly development of the new German social system was the institution of the „Work Commissioners."

They would essentially be conciliators and arbitrators. When gears were grinding, they were the ones who would have to apply the grease. They would see to it that the Councils of Trust were functioning harmoniously to ensure that

regulations of a given business enterprise were being carried out to the letter.

They were divided among 13 large districts covering the territory of the Reich.

As arbitrators they were not dependent upon either owners or workers. They had total independence in the field. They were appointed by the state, which represented both the interests of everyone in the enterprise and the interests of the society at large.

In order that their decisions should never be unfounded or arbitrary, they had to rely on the advice of a „Consulting Council of Experts“ consisting of 18 members selected from various sections of the economy in a representation of sorts of the interests of each territorial district.

To ensure still further the objectivity of their arbitration decisions, a third agency was superimposed on the Councils of Trust and the 13 Commissioners: the Tribunals of Social Honor.

Thus, from 1933 on, the German worker had a system of justice at his disposal that was created especially for him and which would „adjudicate all grave infractions of the social duties based on the enterprise community.“

Examples of these „violations of social honor“ are cases where the employer, abusing his power, displayed ill will toward his staff or impugned the honor of his subordinates; cases where staff members threatened work harmony by spiteful agitation; the publication by members of the Council of confidential information regarding the enterprise which they became cognizant of in the course of discharging their duties. (Marcel Laloire, *op. cit.* p. 52).

Thirteen „Tribunes of Social Honor“ were established, corresponding to the 13 Commissions.

The presiding judge was not a fanatic; he was a career judge who rose above disputes.

Meanwhile the enterprise involved was not left out of the proceedings: the judge was seconded by two assistant judges, one representing the management, the other a member of the Council of Trust

This tribunal, the same as any other court of law, had the means of enforcing its decisions. But there were nuances. Decisions could be limited in mild cases to a remonstrance. They could also hit the guilty party with fines of up to 10,000 marks.

Other very special sanctions were provided for that were precisely adapted to the social circumstances: change of employment, dismissal of the head of the enterprise or his agent who had failed in his duty. In case of a contested decision, the legal dispute could always be taken up to a Supreme Court seated in Berlin – a fourth level of protection.

From then on the worker knew that „exploitation of his physical strength in bad faith or offending his honor“ would no longer be allowed. He had to fulfill certain obligations to the community, but they were obligations that applied to all members of the enterprise, from the chief executive to the messenger boy.

Germany's workers at last had clearly established social rights that were arbitrated by a Labor Commission and enforced by a Tribunal of Honor.

Although effected in an atmosphere of justice and moderation, it was a revolution.

This was only the end of 1933, and already the first effects of it could be felt.

The factories and shops large and small were reformed or transformed in conformity with the strictest standards of cleanliness and hygiene: the interior areas, so often dilapidated, opened to light; playing fields constructed; rest areas made available where one could converse at one's ease and relax during rest periods; employee cafeterias; proper dressing rooms.

With time – that is to say, in three years – those achievements would take on dimensions never before imagined: more than 2,000 factories refitted and beautified; 23,000 work premises modernized; 800 buildings designed exclusively for meetings; 1,200 playing fields; 13,000 sanitary facilities; 17,000 cafeterias.

Eight hundred departmental inspectors and 17,300 local inspectors would foster and closely and continuously supervise those renovations and installations.

The large industrial establishments moreover had been given the obligation of preparing areas not only suitable for sports activities of all kinds, but provided with swimming pools as well.

Germany had come a long way from the sinks for washing one's face and the dead tired workers, old before their time, crammed into squalid courtyards during work breaks.

In order to assure the natural development of the working class, physical education courses were instituted for the younger workers; 8,000 such were

organized. Technical training would be equally emphasized, with the creation of hundreds of work schools, technical courses and examinations of professional competence, and competitive examinations for the best workers in which large prizes were awarded.

To rejuvenate young and old alike, Hitler had ordered that a gigantic vacation organization for workers be set up. Hundreds of thousands of workers would be able every summer to relax on land and sea. Magnificent cruise ships would be built. Special trains would carry vacationers to the mountains and to the seashore. The locomotives that hauled the innumerable worker-tourists in just a few years of travel in Germany would log a distance equivalent to fifty-four times around the world!

The cost of these popular excursions was nearly insignificant, thanks to greatly reduced rates authorized by the Reichsbank.

Did these reforms lack something? Were some of them flawed by errors and blunders? It is possible. But what did a blunder amount to alongside the immense gains? That perhaps the transformation of the working class smacked of authoritarianism?

That's exactly right. But the people were sick and tired of anarchy. To feel commanded didn't bother them a bit. In fact, people have always liked having a strong man guide them.

One thing for certain is that the turn of mind of the working class, which was still two-thirds non-Nazi in 1933, had completely changed.

The Belgian author Marcel Laloire would note: „When you make your way through the cities of Germany and go into the working-class districts, go through the factories, the construction yards, you are astonished to find so many workers on the job spoiling the Hitler insignia, to see so many flags with the swastika, black on a bright red background, in the most populous districts.”.

The „Labor Front” that Hitler had superimposed on all of the workers and employers of the Reich was for the most part received with favor.

And already the steel spades of the sturdy young lads of the „National Labor Service” could be seen gleaming along the highways.

The National Labor Service had been created by Hitler out of thin air to bring together for a few months in absolute equality, and in the same uniform, both the sons of millionaires and the sons of the poorest families.

All had to perform the same work and were subject to the same discipline, even the same pleasures and the same physical and moral development

On the same construction sites and in the same living quarters, they had become conscious of their commonality, had come to understand one another, and had swept away their old prejudices of class and caste.

After this hitch in the National Labor Service, they all began to live as comrades, the workers knowing that the rich man's son was not a monster, and the young lad from the wealthy family knowing that the worker's son had honor just like another young fellow who had been more generously favored by birth.

Social hatred was disappearing. A socially united people was being born.

Hitler could already go into factories – something no man of the so-called Right before him would have risked doing – and hold forth to the mob of workers – tens of thousands of them at times, as in the Siemens works.

„In contrast to the von Papens and other country gentlemen,” he might tell them, „in my youth I was a worker like you. And in my heart of hearts, I have remained what I was then.“

In the course of his twelve years in power, no incident ever occurred at any factory he visited. When Hitler was among the people, he was at home, and he was received like the member of the family who had been the most successful.

CHAPTER 15

CONQUEST BY CAPTIVATION

In order to triumph in politics, it isn't enough to be able to count on the fanatic devotion of a few thousand booted and helmeted SA who beat the Marxists to a pulp when they come looking for trouble. Fear isn't enough in politics. Nor is force. Nor discipline. A military man can order, shout, and everyone comes to attention. The politician must charm, must captivate.

What did Hitler have to make him a charmer?

At first sight he was nothing to get excited about. He was poorly dressed, wore a wretched blue jacket that ran as soon as he started to perspire. He had only one shirt, worth about two cents, hideous brown shoes, a gabardine raincoat that was always wrinkled, and a rather battered old gray hat.

His apartment was a garret: carefully furnished, clean and neat, but still a garret.

Hitler was personally always remarkably clean, his face almost too shining. His pants, though very worn, were always carefully creased. He was well liked by the little people of his neighborhood. Some tradeswomen would bring him an egg. Others would sit down at table with him at a modest coffeehouse. He was a simple man, and he would always remain so.

But the others? The rich people? The complex intellectuals? That was the big surprise. No sooner had Hitler held a few meetings than he became the favorite of the most distinguished drawing rooms in Munich. Was it because as humans go, he was a phenomenon? Because his voice thundered in a boudoir as if he were haranguing a Munich audience of 7,000 at the Krone Circus? Or because women of fashion liked to exhibit originals at their salons? No, indeed!

We must get used to this idea: Hitler was received in what is called high society not as a brute without manners, or as a rather droll eccentric. His success was that of a charmer.

He captivated the common people. But he was also going to captivate, and on short acquaintance, the very different members of the social elite, including the most prominent – and often the most distinguished – society women of his time.

Rubbing elbows with aristocrats didn't bother him at all if they belonged to the true elite who had risen because they possessed real qualifications. In the same manner, he would later take great interest in meeting powerful industrialists, for he appreciated men with imagination and character, with a passion for doing something, men who conceived something great and then achieved it

What he detested was leveling down, the false equality in the mediocre. Equality does not exist. No two horses are identical. No two stars are identical. Nor two thumbs identical. Every worthy man should have his chance, whatever his origin. If he has gone beyond the commonplace, the easy, the vulgar, he is worthy of respect. For Hitler, inequality in worth was a law. In his view, being a great industrialist was as worthy of respect as being a good mechanic. And vice versa.

Hitler thus would not have dealings with the „well-to-do“ class, with their peevish complexes of the unsatisfied. The worst of faults in social life is to be jealous of those who have managed to rise, instead of sincerely congratulating them. Hitler was aware of the genius he had within himself. But he approached without bitterness, even with curiosity, those who at the moment had risen much higher than himself.

He was fascinating.

But was it simply a matter of a physical attraction, such as a crooner may offer?

Not exactly. He was neither handsome nor ugly. Only his eyes of a deep blue threw off unexpected sparks. His hands, too, were noteworthy; they almost flew when he spoke. Apart from that, there was nothing special. Average height, a rather heavy gait. An ordinary mustache.

Then, in what way was he pleasing?

He was liked first of all for his engaging manner. He was very Viennese. His mother had been a fine woman. He had a charming way with words, picturesque, sensitive. One of his great special talents: was to kiss the hand while bowing low, then straightening up, to direct into the woman's eyes an unexpected flashing regard from his own.

The Hitler of the violet blue eyes was only one of the many Hitlers. Women scarcely ever knew any but the first one, all gentleness, even shyness. With his friendly presence, a smile like the flowers of spring and incomparable eyes, he earned forgiveness in advance.

Only this personal charm explains why Hitler immediately, at first meeting,

was noticed, admired and often – more or less secretly – loved by women of breeding, of superior intelligence and beauty, and of a social class a thousand times superior at the time to his own.

Women of the most varied kind, moreover.

This man who was represented to be a narrow nationalist for whom, to believe his detractors, anything that was not German was vermin or dirt, would choose as his most important collaborators men who came from other countries or who had strong attachments abroad.

Rudolf Hess, his right hand, came from Egypt and had a British education. Himmler had a French great-grandfather, named Passaquay, from the important village of de la Roche. Baldur von Schirach was half American. Only English was spoken in his home. Goering had married a Swedish woman. Goebbels's wife had lived for four years in a Belgian boardinghouse. Rosenberg was of Baltic origin. Darré was an Argentine.

Hitler was open to everything that was non-German. He especially wished to enrich the language of his country with words from other languages. Though passionately fond of German music, he did not hesitate to have the football songs of Harvard University plagiarized for his SA! He had a series of German marches which he thought too solemn adapted to the American cadence. The „Fight, Fight, Fight“ of Harvard became „Sieg! Sieg! Heil! Sieg heil!“

During the trials, Hitler marked time like a drum major: „That's it, that's it, that's marvelous!“ he exclaimed.

One could scarcely be less bigoted about filings foreign.

Foreign women, too, quickly swarmed around Hitler. Elsa, the wife of the editor, Bruckman, was a Hungarian, *nee* the Princess Cantacuzbne. Helene Hanfstaengl was a statuesque New Yorker to whom Hitler vowed a veritable adoration. Gertrude von Seidlitz was a very rich Finnish landowner. Countess d'Allemon, who, after having known Hitler in Berlin in 1921, predicted that he „would be Germany's messiah,“ was French. The American Ambassador William Dodd's daughter, Martha, was mad about the Führer. Without any success, we must add.

The very beautiful Unity Mitford, sister of Lord Redesdale, who for love of Hitler put a bullet in her head on the first morning of the Second World War, was British. Hitler honored her as though she had been a Valkyrie.

German women, to be sure, were also most appreciative of Hitler's charm, women such as the Princess Stephanie von Hohenlohe, or Cosima, Wagner's daughter-in-law, who would dedicate to him not just admiration, but worship.

Hitler remained circumspect with all of them. His prudence did not prevent some tragedies. There were several suicides.

Hitler's pilot, Gen. Hans Bauer, upon his return from Soviet imprisonment recalled with humor the ardor of Hitler's female admirers: „As a statesman in the public eye,” Hitler had said to him, „I must take precautions. If you permit yourself a departure from accepted standards of conduct, no one is concerned about it. If I were to do the same, I'd soon have to hide. Women are incapable of holding their tongues.”

Bauer added: „Naturally I spoke of Hitler to women and girls. They were all enraptured, fanatical, hysterical. On that evening, the conversation with my neighbor turned exclusively upon 'Hitler.' She confessed to being in love with Hitler and to being afraid that she would not find a husband, because she compared all other men with Hitler, and none of them pleased her. I couldn't keep from telling her what Hitler had said to me. She stared at me, abashed: 'Is it true that he said that? Tell him that I wouldn't breathe a word, that I'd rather have my tongue torn out!'"

So, if he had not guarded against it, he could have seduced a dozen women every week. But he kept his weather eye open!

After 1945, some took delight in explaining that if Hitler did not indulge himself, it was because he was impotent. A grotesque lie! Like a thousand others! But the public is excessively fond of these scabrous and spicy stories, these wonderful „revelations.” After a quarter of a century, it has taken the intervention of historian Werner Masser to put an end to this nonsense. He writes:

„The oft-peddled assertion that Hitler would have been incapable of physically satisfying a woman, derives from sheer imagination. It seems beyond doubt that Hitler's sexual life was perfectly normal.”

People have gone so far as to set the greatest possible value on a Soviet report devoted to the examination of Hitler's corpse. According to (this report the Führer had possessed only one testicle!

The body having been totally carbonized with 200 liters of gasoline on April 30, 1945 in the grave adjacent to the Chancellery bunker, it is difficult to see how Stalin managed to snaffle that surprising sexual organ for his collection of war souvenirs. A bit later they had to sing a different tune and admit that the body presented as that of

Hitler was wearing socks that had been patched! That they had withstood for two hours a fire of two hundred liters of burning gasoline partakes of a super-miracle.

„The truth is,“ Werner Maser concludes, „that Hitler never felt linked to a woman, to a man, to relatives, to friends, or to social groups. He was sufficient unto himself.“

The fact that Hitler did not succumb to them at all became an additional stimulant for the women. The most intelligent of them sublimated their affection. One would consider herself his adoptive mother. Another, Helene Bechstein, who at first had been content to give Hitler one of her husband's hats to replace his old faded felt one, at a particularly difficult point in Hitler's struggle emptied her jewelry box, giving him an assortment of diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds, a solitaire and a platinum pendant. These marvels, coming at a time when he was in severe straits, were worth sixty thousand Swiss francs to Hitler!

Gertrude von Seidlitz, the owner of Finnish paper mills, put half of her fortune at his disposal. Another woman contributed half of a large inheritance. There was even a madam of so-called houses of „ill fame“ who regularly contributed the principal portion of her pious receipts to the movement!

Hitler did not in any way solicit these gifts, nor any other gifts. He did not ever wish to be dependent on the generosity of enthusiasts or selfseeking donors. The mayor part of the NSDAP's money was provided by the dues of tens of thousands of members and by their meetings.

During the early years there was an occasional financial contribution or other, either from the Munich industrialist, Heiman Aust, or from the manufacturer of locomotives, Ernst von Borsig.

In those days it was generally not to Hitler but to Gen. Erich Ludendorff that these gifts by financiers were sent. Fritz Thyssen, the industrialist, made a gift of a hundred thousand marks to the general to deliver to Hitler. But apart from these three capitalist benefactors, nothing!

Hitler was as tough in these matters as the hide of a crocodile. You could give him money. Fine. But you better not try to use it as an instrument of pressure. He didn't give thanks or commit himself in any way.

„If someone puts a million marks on the table,“ Hitler explained, „I'll take them without hesitation, unless something is asked of me in return, anything whatsoever.“

Gen. Franz Ritter von Epp also sent the Ludendorff-Röhm team 60,000 marks

taken from the army's secret funds.

„This assistance,” Raymond Cartier, the historian, states, „did not exceed the scale of individual gifts.”

In any case they were only a few rivulets joining the stream of the hundreds of thousands of marks – soon millions of marks – furnished by the contributions of the thousands and thousands of adherents who were sacrificing themselves, and by the speeches of Hitler, who was working himself thin going from one speaker's platform to the next. Each time, marks by the thousands fell thick and fast.

If women, with their infallible intuition of male reality, had been the first to adopt Hitler, men of quality, despite a bit of secret irritation, had rapidly been fascinated in turn.

Hitler was an exceptionally gifted human being-everyone was in accord on that point His culture was immense; his memory was a library. To have read more than he had was unthinkable. His intellectual panorama was that of a mountain climber who views the world from the top of Mont Blanc.

Seeing his first cohorts marching by, tramping the pavements of Munich, shouting their guttural appeals, one might have thought that their leader was a rough *Landsknecht*. But he was a refined artist who appeared in society, where he revealed himself to be pleasant and lively and talked for hours of Vermeer, or of Delft, or of Botticelli.

Above all, he was most passionately fond of music. He fairly lived for the music of Wagner.

The only luxury he allowed himself during the early years was a rickety used upright piano that was always about to collapse if it was played too enthusiastically. For lack of space, he had installed it in the corridor of his little personal refuge. In his moments of lassitude, he recovered his optimism by playing a Bach fugue, or had his friends play some Mozart or Chopin or Beethoven, or „the Death of Love“ from *Tristan and Isolde*, or even Richard Strauss. He also had a passion for flowers.

In society he tried never to overreach himself. He was not up on all the customs. He didn't pretend he was used to fancy food; he would lean over to the mistress of the house and say: „Could you be so kind as to tell me how this dish is eaten?”

He could have bluffed, but he was without affectation.

It is almost impossible – since any praise of Hitler is forbidden – to speak of his

delicacy of feeling.

It is reflected especially in his poems. To find any of them today is work for an archivist. Most of them were taken to the United States in 1945. These poems are not the equal of the lyric poetry of Schiller, but their inspiration is revelatory of a great sensitivity. One of these poems, found in the national archives in Washington, will seem mediocre to cynics, but it is profoundly moving, recalling as it does his dead mother:

When your mother has grown older,
And you have grown older,
When what was formerly easy and effortless
Now becomes a burden,
When her dear loyal eyes

Do not look out into life as before,
When her legs have grown tired
And do not want to carry her anymore –
Then give her your arm for support,
Accompany her with gladness and joy.
The hour will come when, weeping, you
Will accompany her on her last journey!

And if she asks you, answer her.
And if she asks again, speak also.
And if she asks another time, speak to her
Not stormily, but in gentle peace!
And if she cannot understand you well,
Explain everything joyfully;
The hour will come, the bitter hour,
When her mouth will ask no more!

The Hitler expressing such love for his mother throughout this touching threnody was a Hitler in the midst of a fight for his life.

It was not long before the most diverse personalities were coming to Hitler. University professors. Creators of industry. Writers. Legends of the First World War such as Grand Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. Political leaders like Count von Bissing.

The elderly English publicist, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, after having seen and listened to Hitler, would make this prophetic statement:

„Great tasks await you. My confidence in Germanism has not been shaken for a

single moment, although my expectations, I confess, have fallen pretty low. Now in one stroke, you have changed my state of mind. Germany, in giving birth to a Hitler at the moment of her greatest distress, proves her vitality; the same goes for the radiant force one feels emanating from you. The two things, indeed, go hand in hand. May God protect you.”

Werner Maser felt compelled to state: „In plain fact, the intellectuals have fallen in step with Hitler. The fascination of the Hitlerian ideology has had an effect on them, too.”

As early as 1920, the great German writer, Rudolf Jung, declared that „Hitler will one day be our greatest man.“

Hitler, however, never felt any admiration in return *vis-à-vis* the intellectuals. They often irritated him with their self-conceit. Many of those who pompously called themselves intellectuals often had, in fact, no more than a veneer of intellectuality. They hung a diploma on the wall like the bulletin board listing prices at the butcher's. This title of glory has a wide gilt frame. And then? What do they know? In particular, what conception do they have of the world and of mankind?

Their pretensions are often the equal of their mediocrity. They look down their noses at anyone who hasn't obtained his letters patent, as they have, this diploma which they think establishes their exclusive superiority for all time.

Hitler had genius. But for your average „intellectual,” what is genius?

For him, the sum of knowledge is his sheepskin. Genius is not in his range of experience. It makes him uncomfortable. It seems almost like science fiction to him. He doesn't believe in it. He is normal. By virtue of what was Hitler beyond normal? Or especially, above normal?!

Hitler didn't dwell on it. He knew very well that you can't pass a camel through the eye of a needle.

Besides, Hitler did not trust intellectuals.

Many of these semi-calculators were ambitious little men. The workingman is openhearted; he gives of himself; he doesn't weigh everything. The petty lawyer reckons: „If I enroll in his party, will Hitler give me a build-up? Shall I not one day become a regional deputy, or even a member of the Reichstag?”

Hitler saw through these ulterior motives so clearly that he decreed that in any and every organization of the party, there would *beanumerus clausus* of intellectuals:

that at least two-thirds of the members had to come from the middle class of people, the little people who constitute the framework of nations, as well as from the proletariat that is the good red blood of the country, the very basis of its life.

As for the women, that was another matter.

If women in politics were instinct and élan, they were also constancy. He was delighted to see women by the thousands attending his meetings. Once they are over, he laughingly explained, the men scatter into the nearby cafes, and the effect of the speech grows blurred; but if the wife is there and immediately takes her husband home, the meeting is recreated between the two of them. It doesn't take flight; it becomes anchored!

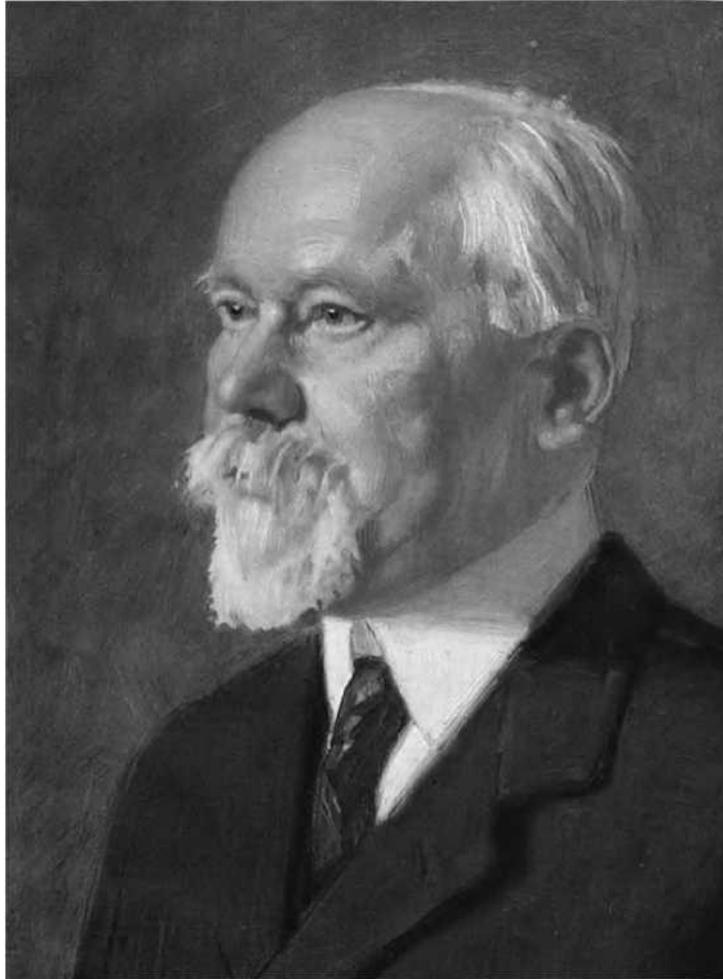
Thus, for Hitler, women were not just the grace, the wonder, the gift of beauty of the gods; they were the foundation of National Socialism in family life.

The mother inculcated the faith. The daughter gave it drive. The illumination they had experienced made them radiant transmitters of the most effective propaganda.

Women, who had been shunted aside from politics up to then, would quickly become an essential element of National Socialism, giving it a quality of romanticism, so important to German sensibilities, and an expansive force more mysterious and much more subtle and lasting than that given by men.

This understanding on Hitler's part of the feminine genius was also something new in the Germany of 1921.

Millions of women year after year would gather in masses behind Hitler with their passion, their gifts, their bewitching and infectious dynamism. They would be the first feminine shock force in the modern political world. Hitler, in espousing Germany, his only true love, had espoused all of them.



Raymond Poincaré was a warmongering French politician and anti-German racist. Angry that Germany could not pay the exorbitant „reparations“ demanded by the Allies for their campaign of aggression in World War I, Poincaré ordered the French Army to invade Germany, occupy the Rhineland and seize the factories and the property of this ancient German region. This invasion and occupation was successful until Hitler came to power and expelled the French aggressors in 1935.

CHAPTER 16

THE POLES OF THE RUHR

Unlikely as it may seem (and figuratively speaking), on Jan. 11, 1923, President Poincaré was going to enter the Ruhr riding on the back of a telegraph pole. We must leave it to the great French journalist Cartier to comment for us on this cavalcade of the crabby bookkeeper of his country:

There was a shortage of 100,000 telegraph poles in the deliveries in kind by Germany in 1922. As early as Jan. 9, 1923, Raymond Poincaré had the shortage verified by the 'Reparations Commission' and asked that it recognize that injured nations had just cause to apply whatever sanctions they judged appropriate.

The default invoked was only a pretext. A delay in the delivery of a million tons of coal because of transportation difficulties was scarcely more valid. The need to occupy the Ruhr was itching French nationalism like pruritus. It had advanced right up to the edges of it in 1921 in occupying Düsseldorf, Deusburg and Ruhrort. It saw the smoke and red glow of the industrial basin. The source of German power was there, and it would be striking a decisive blow to seize it. The French would help themselves to coal right at the pithead of the mines, and above all, in attacking Germany in her economic heart, they would bring about a disturbance capable of breaking the unity that the negotiators of 1919 had been wrong to let remain in existence.

Poincaré, it will be remembered, as early as July 26, 1922 had announced this plan to the press: „The only means of saving the Treaty of Versailles is to act in such a way that our defeated adversaries are not able to fulfill its terms.“ the plan of occupation had long been ready.

Jacques Benoist-Méchin, the other great beacon of history as seen by the French, is no less explicit: „Germany was to deliver 200,000 cubic meters of telegraph poles to France before the end of 1922. Well, by the 15th of December, she had only delivered 65,000 cubic meters. It was this difference of 135,000 cubic meters of telegraph poles that decided the occupation of the Ruhr as a last resort.“

Germany, worn out from the burden of the reparations, could do no more. If not enough poles were provided, it was because she had not been able to saw up any more. She knew that France would not hesitate to jump on her – she would not have risked the invasion if she had been able to deliver a few more rafts of those blasted

poles.

„Germany,” Gustav Stresemann pleaded, „has far exceeded bearable limits in the manner in which she has carried out the treaty.”

The pretext of these telegraph poles – the material importance of which was insignificant – was going to have repercussions abroad.

„Never since the Trojan War,” Sir John Bradbury, the British delegate, would say, with the cold irony of the English, „has wood played so fatal a role in the history of nations.” This new Trojan horse, indeed, was crammed to the eyebrows not with wily Greeks, but with dynamite.

Since Nov. 11, 1918, that is to say, since the very day of the armistice, Poincaré had been waiting for an occasion to thrust the French army beyond the Rhine.

He had extended the power of Paris to Alsace-Lorraine, an ancient Germanic land that had been slightly Frenchified in the course of the cavalry jaunts of Louis XIV and the invasion of the *sansculottes* of the French Revolution.

He had seized by force, for 15 years, the political, military and economic control of the Saar.

He had sent the French army to encamp throughout the Rhineland and had even set up vast bridgeheads on the right bank of the Rhine.

In the east, in violation of the „right of peoples to self-determination,” he had secured two willing henchmen, an artificial Poland in which half of the inhabitants were Ukrainians, Ruthenians, White Russians, Jews and Germans, and a Czechoslovakia in which 50 percent of the inhabitants, the Czechs, ruled with the lash the other 50 percent – composed of Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians and Jews – under their yoke.

In this way France, mistress militarily of western Germany, thanks to these two military satellites, would hem in Germany of the east as well. The new Polish border, or more exactly, Franco-Polish border, was only an hour from Berlin by truck.

But that wasn't enough. M. Poincaré meant to dismember Germany. He had slipped into the old moth-eaten cassock of Cardinal Richelieu. He could hardly fragment the territory of Germany into three hundred principalities, as in the glorious days of the Treaty of Westphalia, but he wanted at least to cut her up into a few little rival states: a Bavarian state to the south; and, between France and the Rhine, a supposedly independent Rhineland.

The entire postwar period had been nothing but a deceitful series of machinations aimed at fomenting Bavarian separatism and creating, through the Rhineland and in the Palatinate, republics separate from the Reich.

Gen. Charles Mangin had been a particularly Machiavellian expert in the igniting of these various uprisings.

Only the peremptory riposte of an incensed Wilson, forewarned at times by the commander-in-chief of the American troops in the Rhineland, had forced Poincaré to put these republics temporarily on the shelf.

He was only waiting for the moment to bring them out again.

Above all else, Poincaré's great objective was the Ruhr that provided Germany – a Germany that had just been despoiled of her mines and metallurgical industries of Upper Silesia – of 85 percent of her steel and 80 percent of her coal.

Occupying the Ruhr, getting his hooks on her steel and on her coal, would ruin and destroy the Reich for once and all.

Earlier, in 1921, on the 7th of March, the fatal blow had come within an inch of succeeding.

The occasion had been furnished by terrorists who were getting their orders by radio from Moscow. The Communists of Germany had just fomented a new revolution in the Ruhr and were committing frightful atrocities. As historian Joachim Fest has recounted:

They seized the „level's of control" particularly in Central Germany and in the Ruhr basin. Their watchword „arm the proletariat" found a receptive audience. Very quickly, following a mobilization carried out almost without hitches, testifying to a carefully elaborated plan, vast numbers of effectives were separated into solid military formations. And, in the region situated between the Rhine and the Ruhr, a „Red Army" of 50,000 men had been raised.

In a few days it had conquered almost the whole of the industrial basin. The feeble units of the Reichswehr and of the police that tried to resist were eliminated. And in certain localities, veritable battles took place. A wave of assassinations and pillaging and arson swept over the land.

If they were to attempt to contain this terror, the only route for the handful of soldiers the Reich still possessed involved not just crossing the territory on the right bank of the Rhine occupied by the Allies, but the transport of a few scant troops

across the short strip of territory on the other side of the Rhine that was simply demilitarized at Versailles. The Germans had anxiously asked that they be authorized to take this corridor. They asked again and again. No response. Finally, they could not let any more of their compatriots be massacred, and a few units of the remaining German army, almost without arms, used the corridor. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George had given his consent. France, no! French troops were immediately hurled against Darmstadt and Frankfurt as punishment for this simple German action for public safety.

On March 7, 1921, Poincaré gave us a new version of the coup.

Forty thousand Bavarian veterans, members of the „Steel Helmet,” had held a perfectly normal assembly of comrades in Munich. Berlin had not forbidden it. The instantaneous response: a second French invasion had been launched, spreading to Düsseldorf, Ruhrort, Deusburg and the neighboring ports.

On Jan. 9, 1922, a third edition came out. But this time it was no longer just a few large towns; it was the entire Ruhr – namely 80 percent of the industrial life of Germany – that was going to be overrun.

Immediately after the announcement of this new invasion by Poincaré, the United States ambassador in Paris, Mr. Child, had been seized with such indignation that he had proposed to Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes that he „go over the head of the French government with an immediate direct appeal to public opinion.”

The British were still more definitely opposed to Poincaré’s piratical operation.

„After consultation with the legal counselors of the crown,” French historian Cartier notes, „Lord Curzon, Foreign Secretary of Great Britain, would declare and would establish in a 55-page report that this was a matter of a violation of the Treaty of Versailles: ‘the occupation of the Ruhr constitutes an aggression in time of peace and a violation of the Treaty of Versailles.’ ”

Some people would have the cheek to declare later that in occupying the Rhineland in 1935, it was Hitler who had broken the treaty. But the British statement is there: M. Poincaré had torn it to pieces 15 years earlier, on Jan. 11, 1922, the day when the French military tide – and a Belgian division – spread out over the Ruhr, the largest industrial center of the West.

The English and the Americans made their opposition to this adventure quite clear, and in France likewise important persons went on record that they were not at all in agreement with the president of the republic. Marshal Foch, for all he was beset by the Rhenish itch, had immediately called this affair of the Ruhr „a scurvy

business." the future Prime Minister Edouard Herriot, while keeping it from his colleagues, had said under his breath: „I personally consider the occupation of the Ruhr illegitimate, but I do have to take a certain French opinion into account" As for Clemenceau, the old „Tiger," who had spent his life hating Germans, he flatly declared his opposition to it.

The future would quickly prove him right.

This „armed attack," this „outrage against a people, its territory and its economic life," as Stresemann declared, had done injury to all of Germany, as though she had been skinned alive.

The French bayonets had hardly been flashed in the streets of Essen, on Jan. 18, 1922, than terrible decrees of seizure came crashing down: on customs receipts, on taxes, on coal, on the state forests, on manufacturing licenses! Everything was confiscated.

Eight days later, determined to bring Germany to her knees in the bitter cold (it was the 26th of January) and shut down all the factories in unoccupied Germany, thus putting millions out of work, Poincaré banned the shipment of coal or coke from the Ruhr to any part of Germany not occupied by the Allies.

„In this way," the French „Gauleiter" of the invaded Ruhr, M. Paul Heard, calmly announced, „the Rhineland and the Ruhr are going to be totally separated from the rest of Germany."

That was exactly what M. Poincaré wanted: a West Germany that he would cut into pieces and an East Germany doomed to economic destruction.

The working masses in the Ruhr had received the occupation forces until patriotism. They had greeted them by singing the *Wacht am Rhein*, the Reich's second national anthem. Response: mass arrests, enormous fines, humiliations of all kinds, and finally the fusillade.

Yes, the fusillade! the Krupp workers – not capitalists even so – had taken it upon themselves to demonstrate in their factories in favor of liberty. The French troops fired on them: thirteen dead, about 30 wounded.

Five hundred thousand Ruhr workers massed silently at the funeral, with heads bowed. New sanctions! For weeks the French courts-martial would be working full speed, not against the officers who had ordered the firing on a defenseless crowd, but against the owner and the directors of Krupp: 15 years, 20 years in prison!

On top of that would come expulsions: 140,000 Germans were expelled from the Ruhr.

At the height of this national tragedy, how had Hitler, the preeminent nationalist, reacted?

CHAPTER 17

HITLER'S EMPHATIC "NO"

The government of the Reich had called on all German citizens to unite against the invader by means of „passive resistance.“ Contrary to all expectations, Hitler flatly refused to be associated with it. He knew very well that his decision was going to arouse indignation. He paid that no heed. He had made his decision: It would be no!

Why „no“? He knew that the government of the Reich, unstable because it was a parliamentary government and the target of every trap set by all those who were not Cabinet ministers (already eight governments since Weimar, one every six months!), would be incapable of leading the resisters to victory. It would not have the guts. It would flounder and collapse.

Hitler believed that to render the invasion inviable, it would be necessary to do as in Russia: to leave nothing behind but scorched earth, to destroy everything, so that France, empty-handed, herself ruined by the enormous costs of her military campaign and harried on all sides, would experience a second Berezina.

„Of what importance is it,“ he declared to the mini-resisters of Berlin, „if in the catastrophe of our epoch some factories are destroyed? The blast furnaces can explode and the bridges be blown up one after another. The French army will no longer be able to go farther astray in that kind of a doomsday horror.“

Hitler didn't fear such massive destruction in the least: „When the German people rise again, all the rest will rise.“

Was it not like that in 1945, notwithstanding that the Second World War had destroyed all of Germany light down to its foundations?

Furthermore, Hitler did not wish to sully his movement by involving it in the dubious demonstrations of sterile parties that were sure to quit in the middle of the fight, as they had done previously when they had to make a decision on the signing of the 'Healy of Versailles.

If they now limited their opposition to the invaders to passive resistance, the threat of losing the contest was much more formidable still, especially in this terrible winter of 1923 when the German people were without work, hungry, and economically, socially and politically at the mercy of a pitiless foe who was aimed to

the teeth and encamped right on German soil.

„The road to Berlin will pass through a river of blood,” Minister General Wilhelm von Seeckt had said. Nothing but talk. The phantom German army wouldn't hold out against the divisions and tanks of the French for 24 hours. Only an enormous, a constant, an implacable sabotage could make life impossible for Poincaré.

The democratic power of Berlin, a weakling trembling at the idea of assuming any responsibility, would never have the guts to put up an active resistance instead of a passive resistance that was a lost cause in advance.

Hitler did not have the slightest confidence either in the head of the government of the Reich, the supercapitalist Cuno. Events would prove him right. In August, Cuno would give up and resign, his battle of the Ruhr lost.

For Hitler to associate himself with these weak and corrupt politicians would benefit only them.

„That kind of stupid reconciliation between the parties would be the death of us. For us to line up with them and, particularly, with the Marxists, would mean sinking into anonymity.”

For him, just as much the enemy as the invaders were the politicians who, through cowardice and incapacity, had made the outrage of the Ruhr possible. Instead of fraternizing with them, it was as imperative to pitch into them as into the foreign troops. And even first.

Hitler told the Germans: „Only when you have exterminated that rabble can the regeneration of Germany and the fight for her rights begin.”

Going thus counter to general opinion demanded a degree of self-control and a vision of the future exceeding the ordinary.

„With remarkable logic,” says Fest, the German historian, „in spite of all the enmities and even against the imposing authority of Ludendorff, he [Hitler] maintained the thesis that it was necessary first to settle accounts with the internal enemy.”

No active resistance without a preliminary purification.

„The first political decision Hitler took that went beyond local limits demonstrated a disavowal of all that false fraternity that was the rule from Kahr to Papen. It proved beyond any question that, forced to choose, he acted as a veritable

revolutionary.”

When he fought, he wanted it to be all out, Fest recalls:

„There is no doubt that Hitler was animated by the same will to put up a defense as the other forces and parties. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, his refusal was aimed not so much at file resistance itself, as at the passive resistance, the halfway resistance.”

Normally, in taking so outspokenly a position that was both negativist and maximalist at The same time, Hitler would be running a great risk of discrediting himself.

With great self-satisfaction, the under-secretary of state, Herr Daniel von Hainhausen, said to Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno: „Many people no longer speak of him without shrugging their shoulders.” Herr Cuno would not shrug his shoulders for very long. The French had hardly more than settled into their barracks at Essen when Hitler appeared before a great crowd at the famous *Bürgerbräuhaus*, where he had so many times set the public on their ears.

His speech would be totally imprudent. His theme: „Enemy number one is the Weimar regime. Let us not be impressed by appeals for a joining together in which everyone will fail and we shall find ourselves compromised. Our three million comrades who fell on the western front and on the Eastern Front would not forgive us for betraying them by placing our hands in the hands of the saboteurs of November 1918. A public demonstration of mourning has been called for tomorrow: the NSDAP will not participate in this false demonstration of patriotism.”

These sentences fell on the crowd like grenades. Hitler was undaunted. He convoked a national congress at Munich for the 17th of January – that is, two weeks after the invasion. He announced that he would hold twelve big meetings there on the same day, scattered through the various districts of the Bavarian capital.

If the Weimar regime had truly thought Hitler had made a mistake in taking a stand against the mini-resistance of the government, they ought to have let him go ahead and fall on his face, thereby administering proof that the people would not follow him.

The contrary was what took place. With a startling lack of psychology, the Bavarian government, in accord with Berlin, committed the gaffe that the least dab of political sense ought to have made them avoid: They flatly banned Hitler’s twelve big meetings as well as all processions and the wearing of National Socialist insignia.

Fortunately for Hitler, he already had important confederates in the army. They put pressure on the Bavarian government. As ever in a democracy, they split the difference, authorizing six meetings instead of twelve.

Hitler immediately seized the official six meetings. He would get the other half of the bargain as well on Jan. 27, 1922, when, without asking authorization from anyone, he actually held his twelve meetings.

„The Nazi congress,” Joachim Fest recounts, „was a triumph. The Krone Circus, full up to the rafters, resounds for the first time with the cry thought up by Dietrich Eckart: *‘Deutschland Erwache!’* [‘Germany, Awake!’ – Ed.] The delivery to 600 SA of brand new banners, designed by Hitler on the model of Roman eagles, takes place on the Marsplatz despite being banned. Then, with music and flags in the van, the Hitler troops traverse the center of Munich to reach the Kindlkeller on the other bank of the Isar. The roadblocks are opened ahead of them. The Bavarian government unhappily realizes that it is not entirely sure of its police.”

Thus, contrary to all predictions, Hitler triumphed that day. God knows, however, that his colleagues had been uneasy. Röhm himself would sigh: „Hitler has put himself on the spot. He is risking a devastating loss of prestige.”

But the German public had understood. The proof of it had just been given. His governmental opponents had been discredited, their bans flouted.

Hitler was the man of the impossible: „The impossible always succeeds,” he declared. „The improbable is the surest thing there is.” He added: „Once we lose our will, we lose everything. Life is a battle.” Where anyone else would have lost, Hitler was going to win. Month after month, events would prove him right.

In the Ruhr, active resistance in the Hitler style was making the occupiers tremble: 86 attacks during the month of March alone. The railroad bridge of Dueren was blown up. Then it was the turn of the Duisburg bridge: 12 soldiers of the occupation troops killed, 20 wounded.

Tirard, the French governor, wrote: „Our men found themselves facing unprecedented difficulties.”

With the German employees responding to every order of the occupying forces with a determined „no,” it was going to be necessary to bring 12,000 agents of the French and Belgian railroads into the Ruhr. The 12,000 foreign railwaymen shipped coal to their countries, to be sure, coal that was still piled up at the pithead, but not coal extracted since the invasion. Quite on the contrary, the production of the mines had fallen nearly to zero. The invaders had shoveled up only the old stocks, and

these stocks had been exhausted in a few months.

If the Germans were without coal, the French were now equally so. Their own Lorraine industries, finding themselves without any German coal, were going to have to close their doors.

Extreme situations in military occupations inevitably lead to the same outcome: the shedding of blood. On May 26, 1923, a German Freikorps saboteur, Lt Albert Leo Schlageter, fell under the hail of bullets from a French firing squad. It was war, and war has its laws. But a national martyr had been born in that pool of blood.

Crowds follow their passions. Now, exasperated, they saw the uselessness of the resistance being offered by official circles. Now they were marching all the way with „Hitler the Hard.“ Thirty thousand new members were enrolled in the NSDAP, and people were thronging in so fast that at one point it was even necessary at certain points to close the Munich recruitment offices.

Now, perhaps the only thing that might still shut Hitler up was a particularly hard brickbat hurled in his face: one morning the *Munich Post* came out with this new scare headline on the front page: „Hitler is in the pay of the French!“ Since Hitler had taken a stand against passive resistance, to some people, the accusation could seem likely.

For once, Hitler came near to breaking down. It was too infamous. That night one of his friends had to play a part of the *Meistersinger* for him in his modest hideaway apartment, so that the great Wagnerian orchestration might give him serenity.

Of course, the accusation had no foundation. Hitler filed 10 lawsuits against his calumniators and won them all. The defamers were all sentenced, with the exception of those who, realizing they couldn't dodge the bullet, made a public retraction.

Hitler's whole history, as it is told to people today, is marked with such idiocies, from the Jewish grandmother to poor Adolfs testicles, to cite examples. But this low blow had been particularly ignoble.

The most outrageous charge was that French bribery money had been poured out in a flood! Not just an insignificant sum. By no means! Eighty- two thousand gold francs, an amount which, converted to marks, represented at least ten truckloads of Reichsbank bills in that particular month.

In Bavaria as elsewhere, France was carrying on her work of disrupting German unity. Notwithstanding that it was prohibited by the Weimar Constitution, she had

established a legation in Munich led by a minister plenipotentiary, M. Emile Dard. The big man of this mission was a certain Maj. Richert, a very important agent of the Intelligence Department who enjoyed the full confidence of M. Poincaré.

These special agents first applied themselves to winning over Prince Rupprecht, who was not malign but was burning to return to a palace from which the family had fled, falling into a ditch, on the evening of Nov. 9, 1918, when the agitator Eisner had launched the Marxist revolution at Munich.

The said prince had not died, sword in hand, on the threshold of his office. He was susceptible to the song of the French sirens who explained to him that it was only in a Bavaria separated from the Reich and „under the aegis of the French“ that he would be able once again to put on his high boots and flaunt the plumes of his newly repolished helmet in a martial manner.

That was not the worst of it. Princes adore toys. Much more devastating was going to be the revelation of the plot hatched in Munich by the French Major Richert: It aimed at no less than the assassination of anyone who might prove an obstacle to the separatist movement organized from Paris.

The plot had been organized and prepared under Richert's orders and thanks to his gold francs, by important Munich personalities, among them a professor, Herr Fuchs, a celebrated orchestra director, Herr Machhaus, and a legal counselor, Herr Kuehles.

These men were so indisputably guilty that when in March of 1922 they were arrested, two of the leaders of the intended putsch committed suicide in their prison cells.

Professor Fuchs made a clean breast of the matter. The French historian Raymond Cartier has described it.

Fuchs and Machhaus had met with Richert in Stuttgart, Wiesbaden, Mayence, Reichenhall and Munich, and each time large sums in marks, francs or dollars had changed hands. The last meetings had taken place between the 15th and the 21st of February in the Munich residence of Machhaus, at 106 Leopoldstrasse, and at the farm of a certain Guttermann, at Romenthal.

Richert had become importunate: „Of course,“ he had said, „France will remain on the left bank of the Rhine, but providing that you act quickly, she will fulfill your desires ... Only five persons know about our plan, but one of them is the President of Council Raymond Poincaré, and the other four are among the most important men of France. The French action in the Ruhr furnishes you with an opportunity whose like you'll never find again, and,

besides, the French army is ready to occupy the line of the Main to cover you against any reaction by Berlin! But act! Don't wait, get started!" Then Richert had handed Fuchs the equivalent of 22,000 gold marks.

„The action demanded by Richert," Cartier adds, „consisted of a separatist putsch; 100 persons were to be assassinated."

The legal counselor, Kuehles, was sentenced to 20 years in prison. The true culprit, Major Richert, Poincaré's jack-of-all-trades, the man who, with the aim of separating Bavaria from Germany, had coldly prepared for the assassination of 100 men, got off without any harm whatsoever. Poincaré was all powerful and had his agent transferred to a French provincial town.

The Hitler affair, allegedly paid for by the French, collapsed. But still more important for his propaganda, another piece of treachery against Germany by Poincaré had been exposed in broad daylight.

An irascible man, Poincaré continued his work as a wrecker in the Ruhr unabated.

This richest land of the Reich had become a cemetery. And in unoccupied Germany, deprived of the means of subsistence, an entire people had fallen into a state of catalepsy.

That gave Poincaré great satisfaction, despite the fact that the taking of the Ruhr in pawn had proved a catastrophe.

Germany was sinking: For Poincaré, that was the main thing. He wouldn't have loosened her gallows rope a millimeter for anything in the world.

„Germany will wait in vain for any wavering on our part," he declared at Dunkirk on April 15, 1923.

This boastfulness of Poincaré's was his undoing.

His calculations boomeranged on him in the Reich itself in just a few months. Pushing the Germans to the limit of their endurance, he flung them *en masse* in Hitler's direction.

Stresemann would make this shrewd observation: „I believe I recall having stated that every speech given by M. Poincaré on Sunday helped the nationalists win another hundred thousand votes. I was mistaken, but only in being very much under the accurate figure."

As Cartier said of Poincaré: „He deserves to go into the history books as Hitler’s principal stepping-stone.”

Incontestably, he was.

Thanks to Poincaré, the National Socialist Party had doubled its membership in a few months.

On the first of September 1923 a hundred thousand Germans came together in Nuremberg. Not a hundred thousand Hitlerites, but a hundred thousand patriots who were going to become Hitlerites. Hitler spoke at the six big meetings of this „German Day.”

The Nuremberg state police drafted a long report on this vast gathering. This is how their informants described the fervor of the crowd greeting Hitler and the guests of honor

„Hundreds of arms were waving handkerchiefs at them. Howel’s and wreaths rained down upon them from all sides. It was like the joyful cry of thousands of disheartened, intimidated, humiliated, overwhelmed people who, in the midst of their enslavement and then distress, sense a ray of hope. Many of the men and women were crying.”

Powerful cohorts of the SA had paraded by, admired and acclaimed.

At the end of the public gathering, all the national parties of southern Germany come together in this „German Day” at Nuremberg decided to set up a common front of battle: the *Deutscher Kampfbund* (German Fighting Group).

And who should be entrusted with its command if not the master swayer of crowds, the best organized leader, the most determined fighter?

So it was. Three weeks later, thanks to the blindness of Poincaré, Hitler became the sole leader.

CHAPTER 18

MILITARY REUNIFICATION

On the strength of the imprudent messages of its ambassador in Berlin, the French government, on April 17, 1934, had broken off all disarmament negotiations without concern for antagonizing the British. The French were relying on the tens of billions of francs they had been putting into their national armaments and above all into their massive defensive network that ran to Belgium's border and the Ardennes forest region, the Maginot Line. The French chief of staff had stated with Olympian assurance, „We shall see how much time it will take Germany to catch up to the twenty billion we have put into our armaments.” (J.B. Duroselle, p.166).

By way of information he had received, France's President Gaston Doumergue was convinced that Hitler was on the point of being overthrown – or assassinated. The German army in 1934 was in a state of absolute inferiority in men and materiel. Doumergue rubbed his hands in anticipation.

But this aged contemporary of Bismarck had no idea of what was really going on in the Third Reich, where the essentials were already in place throughout the country for a swift modernization of the army: the prototypes, the manufacturing plans, the specialized workshops. At the moment, however, Hitler was still only in the planning stage. The army was still training with its mock-up tanks made of cardboard. And swallows still commanded the German skies.

In 1934 Paris believed that a war against the Reich would be little more hazardous than a parade. The government envisioned French tanks driving from the French-occupied Ruhr to Berlin as though competing in a rally. In 1934, that was not altogether improbable.

When rearming, Hitler knew the risk he was running. All that he had built could be brought down in a week. Militarily, he would be unable to prevail.

Creating a thoroughly modern army, and making it technically superior to all the others, would be a long-term priority task. And until Germany had such an army, she would be at the mercy of a still antagonistic France.

The task was no simple one. It was not just a technical matter, but social and political as well. The German army of 1933 was very different from the society that Hitler was in the process of organizing; one in which social advancement was open

to all from the moment they were the best in their field.

The Reichswehr – Germany’s army of 100,000 (as stipulated by the Versailles Treaty) – was led almost exclusively by a privileged class of nobles and squires. It had never tolerated Jewish officers in its ranks. Of the several thousand professional officers, only seven Jews could be counted among them in the postwar years. The German military had practiced „anti-Semitism“ long before Hitler thought of it.

The officer caste had always considered itself to be a force set apart from and above political parties, even governments. They were the Reich. They were its conscience. The politicians only carried out orders. The officer caste didn’t like them and watched them closely. A military dictatorship, within which they worked from behind the scenes, was the system they preferred.

Hitler, with a following of three million militiamen, did not please them. The political militia, the SA, really stuck in their craw. They considered them an offensive imitation of themselves.

But to Hitler, the SA and the Reichswehr were complementary organizations; the intended purpose of the one being political, that of the other, military. Without the SA, Hitler could not have torn apart the straitjacket in which the old regime had tried to confine him. Without the Reichswehr, the borders of the Reich would be wide open. Both were indispensable for Germany. But they hated each other all the same. Gaining at least the neutrality of this touchy officer corps had, by 1934, become far and away Hitler’s most worrisome problem. He had beaten the unemployment problem: that was a question of imagination, of will, and of material resources. He was sure of complete success there. On the other hand, how was he to tame the military?

Hitler had not waited to become chancellor before making an effort in that direction. As early as March 15, 1929, in the course of a mass meeting, he had stated in detail what he considered the army’s „primordial duty,“ adding: „Everyone in the Reichswehr in a position of command remembered what Lenin had done with the czarist officers, the senior officers; before they were murdered, strips of bloody flesh had been carved out of their legs from top to bottom, in a live imitation of the purple strips of cloth marking the trousers worn by staff officers. Everyone also had present in his memory the outrages to which hundreds of German officers were subjected in November of 1918, when Communists like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg ruled the streets of Berlin.“

In this meeting, Hitler wanted the heads of the Reichswehr from afar what would become of them if the Communists were to prevail:

„You would then be no more than political commissars of the regime and have

to sing small or be hunted down and perhaps put up against a wall and be shot." The Communists in pre-Hitler Germany were six million strong, not too far behind Hitler's party in terms of votes.

On Sept 23, 1930, Hitler had turned to the army a second time, using as his tribune the Supreme Court of Leipzig, where he had been summoned as a witness in an action brought against three young officers being prosecuted for disseminating National Socialist propaganda within their unit.

With the greatest clarity, Hitler first reminded the court of the exclusively political role that he assigned to his protective militia: „The assault detachments (SA) have been organized for the sole purpose of protecting the party in its propaganda." Then, over the heads of the highest magistrates of the republic, he had addressed the army itself:

„I have been a soldier long enough to know that it is impossible for a political organization to combat the disciplined forces of the army. I have always made it loud and clear that any attempt on our part to replace the army would be nonsensical. None of us wishes to replace the army. My only desire is that the German state and the German people be imbued with a new spirit. Once we have come to power, we shall see to it that a great army of the German people emerges from the present Reichswehr." (Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*, p.103).

The officers and especially the young people who were already attracted by Hitler's social doctrine had been so affected by his words that the crowd, despite the majestic character of the surroundings, had frantically applauded, to the utter stupefaction of the Buddha-like judges.

Diverse currents had begun to take shape. Notwithstanding the 13,402, 5-17 votes (36.8% of total) obtained by Hitler on April 10, 1932, Gen. Wilhelm Greener, Reichswehr minister and a regime faithful, did not hesitate four days later to ban the SA, thus placing it politically outside the law. His rival and successor, Gen. Kurt von Schleicher, on the other hand, driven by his dogged ambition, had attempted to gain rapport with Hitler in the rather vain hope of gaining his goodwill. To that end, on the 6th of June following, he lifted the ban on the SA that his predecessor had imposed.

On Jan. 30, 1933, after 10 years of a grueling political battle waged in accordance with indisputably democratic electoral standards, Hitler, head of the Reich's most powerful political party, had been elevated to the chancellorship by Hindenburg: albeit with some hesitation.

Scarcely three days had elapsed when Hitler went to the Tiergarten apartment

of the commander-in-chief of the *Heeresleitung* [army high command], Gen. von Hammerstein. Less than a week before von Hammerstein had approached von Hindenburg with a view to preventing Hitler from becoming chancellor.

At the express request of the Führer, Hammerstein had invited to his table all of the principal heads of the Reichswehr: those of the high command and those of the major military districts. Hitler had provided dessert for the meal in the form of two hours of eloquence.

„Hitler,” the historian, Brissaud, wrote, „knew marvelously well how to use guile, how to play it by ear, using intelligence, patience, and great finesse as well.” (Brissaud, *op.cit.*, p.109). The chancellor succeeded in changing the minds of his super top-brass audience by frankly disclosing his intentions and his objectives:

„The goal,” he said, „will be to give Germany back her political power in Europe. To that end, the creation of a strengthened Reichswehr and the reestablishment of compulsory military service are the most important requirements for achieving that goal.” As for the SA the spearhead of his political combat, it would be kept entirely separate from the army: „The internal struggle is not the army’s affair.”

Another fundamental point: „We have no intention of combining the army and the SA.” That eventuality was the great fear of the military caste. Hitler relieved them of it. As for the strong and authoritarian state he intended to build, there he met with an almost unanimous state of mind among these high ranking military men enamored of discipline and firmness.

The idea of seeing the army increase in size enchanted them still more. The more divisions there were, the more promotions there would be. A captain would become a colonel. The colonel would become a general or perhaps even a marshal! All that silver and gold braid created a new, and an extremely attractive, horizon before their eyes. „After having heard him,” Hammerstein would conclude, „we can have complete confidence in the new chancellor of the Reich insofar as our interests and our mission are concerned.”

From March of 1933 on, the wearing of the old historic black, white and red cockade was reestablished on Hitler’s orders. The barracks Confidential Agent Councils, a creation of the Marxists, were abolished. The grandiose opening ceremony for the first meeting of the new Reichstag, carried out at the Potsdam palace on March 21, 1933, under the authority of Marshal von Hindenburg, had filled the generals with pleasure and pride. Now, flamboyant in their red collars, they were publicly honored after having been so disparaged in 1919.

The military budget had been immediately and considerably increased by Hitler. At the proper time, that would permit the transformation of the old Reichswehr, which had been paralyzed by its 12-year enlistment period, into an agile, short-service militia. Great moderation had marked the new appointments. Hitler had even assigned key commands to generals like Ludwig Beck and Friedrich Fromm, who had no sympathy at all for National Socialism.

The personal response to Hitler, however, was not enthusiastic. The generals accepted the chancellor-corporal, but that was all. And not primarily to serve him, but to make use of him. Accustomed to looking down on a government which they meant to keep under their control, many of these high-ranking officers still considered the National Socialist regime as a sort of bridge that they would cross at the first opportunity.

„Above all,” says Andre Brissaud, the historian, „they see in Hitler an excellent instrument they can make use of to replace the republican regime with a military junta or a restored monarchy.” Even Gen. Werner von Blomberg, whom Hitler had included in his government, still spoke of simple „benevolent neutrality.”

„We must keep our distance,” Blomberg explained to his fellow officers, „as befits our status as the foremost power in the nation. Our flag is black, white and red, not the hooked cross. Our military salute is not the Hitler salute. The Horst Wessel song is to us just an expression of party and is none of our concern.”

The above sentiment is quite interesting in that Blomberg had been chosen because, of all the generals, he – along with Reichenau – seemed to come closest to the ideas of the National Socialists.

Hitler was still not at the end of his difficulties. What continued to disturb the generals was that, despite Hitler’s soothing speeches, they still saw the SA as a rival army. In 1932 the SA had attained an enrollment of five hundred thousand. In 1933 it mustered three million men, or thirty times as many as the Reichswehr! To Hitler, these bruisers of the SA were nothing more than a political combat formation. But they had copied the army at all points in the matter of ranks, and organization into battalions, regiments and divisions. Even territorially, their districts closely copied those of the regular army. In Hitler’s mind, the army’s destiny lay in the armed defense of the nation, the protection of its borders. As for the SA, its mission was strictly of a civil and political nature.

Moreover, recruitment was completely different. The SA was made up of tough customers, of fighters, men who for the most part had never been soldiers. Most of their leaders were husky young guys full of spirit and drive. Some of them had been lieutenants or captains in the First World War, but most were only thirty or less in

1933, and too young to have taken part in it. But however young they were, SA leaders took pleasure in their roles as honored officers.

The generals of the Reichswehr, who had been remarkably well trained in strategy and tactics at top military schools, and who had won their braided epaulets after twenty or thirty years of service in the army, were not of a mind to let themselves be put on the same footing as these makeshift generals of a Johnny-come-lately SA. Some of these newcomers holding the highest ranks were still traveling salesmen or even doormen only a few years before. These contrasting forces within the nation formed two separate worlds, as different from one another as a lion and a chimpanzee.

CHAPTER 19

TERRITORIAL REUNIFICATION

In 1937, a final attempt made to bring Austria into the Allied camp would misfire completely at the time of the visit to Paris of the ill-fated Engelbert Dollfuss's successor, Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg. The French socialists, almost all of them Freemasons, were the mortal enemies of the Austrian premier, who was a Christian and anti-Marxist, hence automatically a „fascist.“ Intimidated by the socialists, the French government did not even dare to receive their Catholic guest at the Paris station, but had him alight from his train almost clandestinely at Reuilly, a station of secondary rank.

The Austrian had a devout, modest bearing and a timid voice. Dressed all in black, „he had more of the monastery than of the ministry about him,“ they sneeringly said of him in the Chamber of Deputies, thereby combining politeness with a delicacy of feeling.

They might at least on Sunday have let the Austrian chancellor attend mass at Notre Dame de Paris. That mass was canceled and Schuschnigg was shunted off to the archbishop's private chapel! Wherever he went, they spirited him away.

„Schuschnigg gives me the impression of a council president on a folding seat,“ said Minister Herriot, who was something of a wag, filling his pipe the while.

The French, instead of drawing him into their own ranks, were truly throwing him into the arms of Germany, where a great many of the Austrians, the Marxists as well as the bourgeois nationalists, had for long wished to be.

Wherever he went, the luckless Schuschnigg was treated by the press with insulting indifference.

Even the diplomatic corps was indignant:

„How can the Quai d'Orsay imagine it can stop the annexation of Austria when it doesn't even profess itself capable of having two railway platforms protected?“ (Tabouis, p. 234).

That business of the secret railway station galled Schuschnigg like a sack of cement on his stomach. Pierre Flandin, the French minister conducting Schuschnigg back to his departure platform, asked the Austrian chancellor, in a voice he meant to

be friendly, „Well, did you get to see everything in Paris that you wanted to see?“

The chancellor, dressed in his cutaway, made a stinging reply: „Yes, but I'd like to have seen a real railway station!“

Although Austria had been torn two ways in 1919 and had still been undecided between Paris and Berlin, in those few days France had forever lost any chance of winning Austria to her cause.

That left the Romanians, who, taking after the Poles, did not seem to wish to be convinced.

Romania also knew that if – as France requested – she agreed to let Soviet troops pass through her territory in order to attack Germany in the back, Moscow would attempt to establish herself between the Danube and the Carpathian mountains forever.

The only solution left to France would be to drop temporarily any allusion to the possible passage of Soviet troops. Besides, she would make up for it in 1939, offering Stalin the right of passage that Poland and Romania refused him.

However, the nations of Eastern Europe, bluster as they might, could nevertheless hardly long withstand the pressure of the French in 1934 and 1935. They drank their daily milk from the abundant udder of France. They were all dependent upon her loans, upon her investments, and upon the weapons she supplied, and had no choice but to string along. They would all do it slyly, playing it close to the chest, always ready to change sides or betray.

For France, however, the reinforcement of this second front in Germany's rear was a goal of absolute priority. If she intended to catch renascent Germany in a wolf trap, the east had to be one of the two doors of the trap.

„The effective and rapid functioning of the system of reciprocal alliances was evidently of fundamental importance,“ wrote Prof. Pierre Renouvin. (*Les crises du XXe Siede*, vol. II, p. 34).

At any rate, by considerably increasing the pressure on her satellites and forcing their hand, Paris had got them to undertake some few measures of rearmament. The ultimate effectiveness of such measures would, of course, remain in doubt, but France reckoned they would at least frighten and isolate the Germans.

In any event, „German demands“ with regard to disarmament or rearmament – the Allies could take their choice – were not of much importance in 1934, since

Germany possessed but a fifth of the military power France had at her disposal in men, war materiel, fortifications, and her allies of Eastern Europe.

Poland, the most hesitant of those allies, had been compelled, whether she liked it or not – to keep from having her supplies cut off – to decree a first measure to strengthen her armies: all men from seventeen to sixty- five years of age would be subject to military service, either active or auxiliary. Women, too, would have to undergo „a preparatory stage“ of training.

On the first of January of 1935 the Czechs would take even more draconian measures: they would be the first in the West to institute a two- year period of service.

That meant that all by themselves they would have an army superior to that possessed by Germany at the end of 1934: 202,000 men in seven army corps comprising troops of all categories: mountaineer infantry, cavalry, motorized formations. Yet one would have been hard put, even using binoculars, to discover one single member of the Wehrmacht on the German border at that time.

Romania for her part had added to her army by creating supplementary air squadrons – an air force that certainly could not have come out of the pockets of the Bucharest taxpayers!

As for France, she broke all records in 1935 for military defense spending: more than 10 billion francs of that era.

The explanation was made to the naive that the billions were being poured out because the Germans were spending as much or more, which was completely false. Today we have the official statistics, indisputable figures down to a franc or a mark or a ruble. France at that time was spending twice as much as Germany for her army, even though the latter had a much larger population and militarily was starting again from scratch, Germany was devoting 3.5% of her national income to defense, whereas France was employing 8% and the Soviets 9% for their war aims!

Such were the real figures not only for 1933 but throughout all of 1934.

The French public had been inundated with deliberately false affirmations. Even fifty years later there is scarcely a Frenchman alive who doesn't believe that Hitler spent umpteen billions for rearmament!

The figures are there to dispose of the baloney. Against the 1,450 aircraft that France and her satellites possessed in 1934: not a single military aircraft in Germany at that time. Against her heavy artillery: not a single heavy gun in the Reich. Against

her hundreds of tanks: none at all on the other side of the Rhine. And with the hundreds of armored bastions of her Maginot Line, the Wall of China of the Twentieth Century (and not even a fortlet at that time on the western border of Germany), France was the number one military power in all of Europe.

Though not ordinarily fanatical, the British, who had just doubled their air force, increasing it at one stroke by 820 planes, had taken to uttering some decidedly Napoleonic statements. On July 31, 1934, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, a solemn bourgeois with a stiff collar and the eternal umbrella, had issued a proclamation worthy of the bulletins of the *Grande Armee*: „The English frontier is no longer at Dover but on the Rhine“!

Hurling himself at Germany's few mock tanks with cardboard armor plating, Baldwin felt himself possessed of the intrepid soul of a *sansculotte* – an extreme French revolutionary – charging the Prussians at Valmy on Sept 20, 1792.

One might think oneself gone back to the time of Poincaré's galloping incursions into the Ruhr in 1923!

Even Roosevelt had taken to playing the American Bonaparte. But it was the Japanese first and foremost who irritated him. The Japanese had landed on a hinge of continental Asia. They were only a tenth as greedy as the Russians, however, who had settled from Port Arthur and Darien to the outskirts of Vladivostok without anyone's taking offense at it.

When the Americans wrested land from the Indians, that was a glorious epic where every cowboy hat was the crest of a crusader. Hollywood studios would glorify them for a century.

The same clear conscience when the English, to secure their „lebensraum“ in the Indies, tied refractory sepoy to the muzzles of their cannons. The same when the French settled in Algeria and at Madagascar and Tonkin by artillery fire.

In those cases it was always a matter of glorious wars, of the building of wonderful empires, benevolent and enlightening! the French Empire alone had become fifty times as large (2,500,000 square kilometers) as metropolitan France. The British Empire: one hundred and fifty times as vast (35 million square kilometers) as Great Britain itself (239,000 square kilometers). The Dutch Empire: 1,900,000 square kilometers in comparison with Holland's minuscule territory of 33,000 square kilometers.

Even little Belgium – in those days an airplane could fly over the whole country from one end to the other in less than an hour, nowadays in six minutes – had taken

possession of a giant empire in the heart of Africa: 2,344,116 square kilometers, which the armed conquest of Rwanda and Burundi in the course of the First World War had supplemented. More than thirty hectares per Belgian head!

Conquered pickaninnies on the banks of the River Zaire were gravely taught Flemish; the Malagasy and the Kanak, that their fathers were Gauls with big mustaches; the half-starved Hindus squatting amongst their cows, that their Empress Queen Victoria, set up in all her bronze weight in the great square of Calcutta, was their beloved mother!

All of them, black or yellow, were made to venerate one God, one Christ, one Virgin, and the Apostles, all impeccably white. And everywhere, in Algiers as in Hanoi, horrible cathedrals were built in counterfeit Gothic that no native would again enter, beginning with the first Sunday after the disappearance of the colonizers.

The porcelains of the Chinese were plundered, the wooden masks and carved ivory of the Africans, the sarcophagi of the Egyptians, the miniatures and carpets of the Persians, the bronze statuettes of the Tonkinese. A future French Cabinet minister, Andre Malraux, was even sentenced to three months in prison in Indochina for such an act, not precisely because he had stolen works of art from native subjects, but because he had deprived the Paris museums of them! There, as in the British Museum, or the museum of Amsterdam, or of Tervuren in Belgium, evidence of the art of twenty peoples was accumulated, often even stacked up in the basement.

In sum, civilization had been brought to all of them. It was splendid.

But that the beastly little Japanese, not satisfied with living sparsely on their naked rocks, should have had the presumption to set their dirty yellow feet down on a Manchurian area that was in rampant disorder (imitating the Europeans who had long since landed on the coasts of China), that action had been stigmatized as a crime throughout the white world.

And no action taken to thwart the depredators would be held excessive: not the condemnation of the League of Nations, nor the excommunication of the League of Human Rights, nor yet the weeping of the Salvation Army.

For the entire civilized world, there were thus two kinds of Nazis: those with white faces and those with yellow, those of Hitler and those of the Mikado. They were pretty much the same, both eaters of peoples.

The time would quickly come when Roosevelt would treat them exactly alike and would pass Hiroshima and Nagasaki over the grill while providing his sardonic

friend Stalin with the tens of thousands of tanks and planes that would enable him to destroy the Nipponese of Europe, the Hitlerians.

A mighty rearmament had thus been decided on by Roosevelt with even more conviction that the United States intended to make the Pacific Ocean its own private sea, a sort of Yankee Mediterranean, with both shores strictly reserved.

„The American fleet will be pushed to the extreme limit of its power,“ Roosevelt had declared after the Japanese had transformed their occupation zone into a state, Manchukuo, under the authority of a local notable, Prince Puyi.

A Japanese dominion! What a monstrous thing!

Yet what was the bey of Tunis if not a pre-Puyi? And the sultan of Morocco, treated as a puppet? Most of the time these marionettes got overturned or deported. Who was in command in Tonkin? And in Madagascar? And Rhodesia? And in Bengal? And what if not satellites were the maharajas, bowing and scraping before the English? And Fuad I, so humble in his fez beside the Nile!

Still, after all those, that a modest dominion should arise in Northern Asia under the Japanese flag of the rising sun was plainly intolerable.

Until 1934, colonialism was excellent. But once the English, Dutch, Belgians and Russians were copiously satiated, to imitate them immediately became an abomination.

The mere idea that an overpopulated Germany might expand a bit was an intolerable prospect. And the fact that the little Japanese had already tried to do so in Manchuria demanded an exemplary punishment. It would not be long in coming. The Japanese would get it right in the face in 1945 in the form of two atomic bombs.

Roosevelt, putting aside his crutches to get on his high horse, had immediately ordered the construction of 360,000 tons of new warships. They were going to build 2,320 airplanes in the United States!

„The idea of war is on the way,“ remarked Mussolini on the 24th of August 1934, a month after Roosevelt’s incendiary declaration.

Like all the others, and with still greater vigor, the Soviets had taken the bit in their teeth.

Without breathing a word of it, they had increased the strength of their army in 1934 from 600,000 to nearly a million men. Ten times as many as the Reichswehr of

the same period. And that same year, they were going to have several thousand tanks, paratroop divisions, and a big air force.

As Gen. Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the under minister of war, declared to the Seventh Congress of the Pan-Russian Soviets on Jan. 1, 1935, they would make use of modern techniques in such a fashion that no other army in the world could compare with them.

No country escaped the contagion. Even the Swiss decided to extend the period of military service. Though for centuries they had forged only inoffensive halberds for the use of the mustachioed Vatican guards, they voted a military budget equivalent to more than a billion French francs.

After Hitler's triumph in his plebiscite of Aug. 19, 1934, the ex-Allies were determined to lead him barefooted to await his pardon, as Pope Gregory VII had demanded of the German Emperor Henry IV beneath the walls of Canossa.

One might also, in August 1934, have believed oneself gone back to the month of August 1347, at the time when the bourgeois of Calais, dressed in their shirts and with a rope around their necks, had to come and beg for the mercy of King of England Edward III.



Construction of the Reichs motorway, Frankfurt am Main-Darmstadt-Mannheim:

Work began on Sept. 23 1933, part of the autobahn system that Hitler and his National-Socialist government brought into existence. These public works programs employed workers who had been denied a job under the capitalist Weimar Republic, while also expanding the economy of Germany by creating infrastructure that allowed German businesses to expand. The program would serve as a model to American President Franklin Roosevelt.

CHAPTER 20

PLEBISCITE IN THE SAARLAND

Adolf Hitler stood fast to the proposals he had made to British Minister Anthony Eden on April 16, 1934. He still desired nothing more, despite the universal rearmament, than to give his country an army of limited size. Besides, after a year and a half of power, his essential preoccupation for the immediate future was not military in nature: it aimed above all at straightening out the economy of the Reich. Of the 6 million unemployed on Jan. 30, 1933, more than 4 million had been put back to work by the end of 1934. In the entire Reich there now remained only 1,781,000 jobless. But they still had to be reabsorbed into the economy. It was almost a miracle that in less than two years, their number had been reduced by more than two-thirds.

Pierre Renouvin, the Sorbonne professor and ultra official historian, had to acknowledge those figures and note their exemplary value: „That recovery is taking place without a perceptible increase in domestic prices, despite the devaluation of the pound sterling, and without real salaries suffering any real squeeze.“ (*Les Crises du XXe Siecle*, Vol. n, p. 37).

The first ribbons of the autobahns were running across the fields and mountains. Two thousand factories had been renovated; and leave time had been created, including vacations for workers. More than 100,000 new houses already provided decent housing for the working man, who had been brought to a natural status of social justice and dignity.

Prof. Renouvin, gloomy-eyed, could but agree: „On the whole,“ he wrote, „the recovery is incontestable.“ (Ibid.)

Man was no longer the slave of money. The money that allowed Hitler to inaugurate the greatest economic renaissance of Europe, was no longer due to the banks, nor to the super capitalist bigwigs. Nor had it been obtained by sucking money from the public in the form of taxes that were every year more crushing. The billions involved in the economic and social reconstruction of the Reich were put up by the people themselves, by subscribing of their own free will to short-term bonds paying an honest interest – instead of sinking into the abyss of incomprehensible deficits of bloodsucker states.

The German people would thus spontaneously provide Hitler with twelve billion marks, an enormous reserve fund, larger than the military budget of France,

then the most expensive in the world.

Labor was no longer at the mercy of the dictatorship of money; it was again becoming an effective and creative real force worthy of respect. That was the Hitler revolution: it organized the material in the exaltation of the individual who created. Labor – whether of hand or head – was the greatness and the honor of the national community.

Hitler also thought – of course! – of the ingathering and of the expansion of his people.

He would not go and conquer land and bread in the east by making speeches, but by forging a new army, ultramodern and oriented in but one direction: the East, which, liberated and regenerated, would constitute for Western Europe an impassable protection rather than a risk.

Now at the end of 1934, however, this conception of the future remained for Hitler a projection of distant date.

The armed forces of the Reich were still proportionately insignificant, less than half that of a neighboring country like Czechoslovakia that had only a sixth as many people as the Reich.

If the enemies of Hitler, instead of setting up a deafening racket and seeking ever greater and more ruinous rearmament, had simply utilized the military forces they possessed, they could have overturned Hitler in just a few weeks; for though he had the great masses of the people behind him as in no other country, he still had but a handful of poorly armed soldiers to defend the national and social gains of two years of effort.

„On looking back“ Winston Churchill, king of the warmongers, frankly admitted, „I am astonished at all the time that was granted us.“ (Winston Churchill, *L'Orage Approche*, p. 117). If super armed France had ever had the guts, then she'd have taken her enemy at the end of her bayonets. She was hopping mad, but she was hopping in place. Well, it was necessary to go on the attack, or, if not, to quit screaming and opposing everything and begin discussing, weighing and balancing interests.

Every so often an Englishman who had remained reasonable asked himself the question under his breath.

Sir Eric Phipps, the ambassador of Great Britain in Berlin, wrote: „We cannot regard Hitler simply as the author *Qi Mein Kampf*; and we cannot allow ourselves to

ignore him. Would it not then be preferable to come to terms with this man, who is endowed with such a fearful dynamism? If he pledged his word, his signature would be for all Germany a commitment more powerful than the signature of any other German in the past" (Fest, *op. tit.*, Vol. II, p. 130).

Instead of opposing the Germans, the English and the French might together with them have formed a team without equal in the world – complementing each other economically, each having their own field of action in conformity with their genius and their needs – either beyond the seas or in the complementary lands of Eastern Europe delivered from the Communist tyranny.

„It is in the interest of all," Hitler used to say, „that the problems of the present be resolved in a reasonable and peaceful manner."

One last chance was going to be offered: the plebiscite of the Saar, in January of 1935.

That ancient German territory, occupied by the French since 1918, was called upon, as ordered by the Treaty of Versailles, to decide its destiny by means of a plebiscite.

With a bit of good will, that plebiscite might perfectly well have been avoided and have been the occasion of a friendly settlement that could have brought the two countries together instead of seeing them in one more confrontation. Hitler had desired that negotiation. He had offered it to France months since.

Paris thought it preferable to face the electoral trial, convinced that her German rival would suffer a humiliating defeat.

And so file Germans and the French were going to face each other electorally before the people of the Saar.

Vain duel! The plebiscite would simply be one more milestone leading to the future European civil war.

Hitler had explained his position with great clarity:

„We have the feeling, just like other peoples, that we are at a turning point in history. All of us, the vanquished of yesterday and the victors alike, have the intimate conviction that something has gone wrong. And in particular that men have abandoned reason. All peoples sense it very strongly: a new order must be established on this continent where our peoples are forced to press too tightly against one another in a too-exiguous space." (Fest, *Hitler*, Vol. 11, p. 132).

Continually repeating the verses of the psalm of Versailles while obstinately demanding that they be carried out word for word would not settle anything:

„They are mistaken,” Hitler predicted, „who believe that the word of Versailles can open the door to a new order. That would not be its foundation stone, but rather its tombstone.” (*Ibid.*)

Now, one of the last impositions of the Versailles Treaty – the occupation and exploitation of the riches of the Saar, which had been continued for the benefit of France for 15 years – was coming to an end.

The plebiscite, organized and controlled by the League of Nations and the former Allies, was going to make known whether the inhabitants of the Saar wished to maintain the pro-French status, modify it, or eliminate it.

In 1919, victorious France had aspired to appropriate the Saar along with all the rest of the German territory west of the Rhine.

The political men of France were tenacious. They had sharpened teeth and a plethora of words. The Saar province had tempted them most especially because it was economically the perfect complement to Alsace- Lorraine, which had come under their power again in November of 1918.

In the course of the two previous centuries, the French had watered their horses in the Elbe, the Vistula, and the Moscow, as well as in the Danube, the Tiber, the Tagus and the Guadalquivir.

They had even pitched camp on the banks of the Nile. If Napoleon did not arrive at the Ganges, it was because he had run into a few little annoyances on the way.

France had therefore ridden across the Saar as well as everywhere else. On several occasions. But brief occasions. Under the empire. Under the French revolution. Even, one time or another, under the kings. The town of Saarlouis had been founded by Louis XIV on land unquestionably Germanic, and fortified by Sebastian Le Prestre de Vauban (1633-1707). The French used to explain with pride that a large portrait of the Sun King had even been found at the town hall of Saarbrücken. It was true. It had been discovered, all covered with dust and spider webs, in the depths of a forgotten attic.

Georges Clemenceau, old „Father Victory,” with great shaggy eyebrows and wearing his lopsided blue cap, had explained with vehemence to the preparatory commission of the Treaty of Versailles that the Saar was a living, breathing piece of

old France.

„The great majority of the inhabitants of the Saar are of French origin. Those who are not are Frenchmen in their hearts.“

Delegate Andre Tardieu, a future prime minister, had gone even further, throwing out figures: 150,000 Saar voters were waiting atremble for the hour of participation in the liberating elections.

„Saarbrücken,“ Tardieu exclaimed, „would certainly elect a French deputy!“

The English Lloyd George had not been convinced. He himself judged it more prudent to wait a few years rather than hurry the elections. After a certain time period, they could ask the local voters to decide.

Soft spoken, he asked Clemenceau, who was pawing the ground, why there was so much haste: „Since you are so sure of the sympathy of the Saarlanders, what do you have to lose by waiting? They will be all the more eager to opt for France if none of them can say they forced his hand.“

By waiting, France had been given the advantage of occupying the entire province with her troops, and to dispose as she would of its coalmining potential. More than 70% of the region was covered with coal pits, coking plants and electric power plants. The coal production was fabulous: 20 million tons with which to feed the entire Alsace and Lorraine basins.

With Clemenceau still growling, he was promised that he would in any case be made a gift of the mines. Whatever the result of a plebiscite one day, they would remain French. Clemenceau’s blackmail had succeeded. By asking for too much he had obtained much. In the meantime, he would veritably set up camp in the place, free to engineer things politically as he saw fit.

That is how the bargain was struck at Versailles: France would occupy the entire Saar and exploit the resources as she pleased. She would have fifteen years ahead of her to prepare a plebiscite without any interference or supervision by the German state.

The French made no bones about the occupation. Thousands of German officials who might have been able to carry on a certain national influence were cavalierly turned out France owned everything and could apply whatever pressure was required, militarily, socially and financially.

While the rest of Germany had been engulfed in an overwhelming crisis, with

millions of unemployed, the French administration of the rich coal mines of the Saar was able to pay its miners the highest wages in Europe. (J.B. Duroselle, *Histoire diplomatique*, p. 175). If only to secure his bread, the worker of the Saar ought to have desired that the system which was materially much more reassuring for him be maintained.

Everything concurred to ensure a French solution of the future plebiscite: the economic advantages, altogether more favorable than in the crisis-ridden Reich; and custom-free trade with the West.

Overwhelming French propaganda every day highlighted the damage to ensue from the alternative solution: passage into the clutches of frightful tyranny! People crammed into concentration camps by Hitler! The Israelites dispossessed and separated from each other!

„French officials,” historian Benoist-Méchin has recalled, „have administered the region. Customs duties have been all but abolished on the Franco-Saar border, so that all the wealth of the region has flowed out to the Lorraine, bringing an appreciable stimulus to our industry.

„Finally, French propaganda has had free rein. Day after day the newspapers of Paris and from abroad have had every latitude to enlighten minds about the sinister antecedents of the Hitler regime. Nothing has been left in shadow: not the persecution of the Jews, not the concentration camps, not the revolt of the SA, not the shackles put on the freedom of expression. The leader of the Third Reich is openly accused of muzzling the opposition, of faking his plebiscites, and of subjecting the country to a reign of terror.” (Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l'Armée Allemande*, pp. 256f).

„There is a great deal at stake. And France, well aware of it, is doing her best to have all the trumps on her side. The pro-Germany movements are dissolved, and anti-Nazi emigrants are charged with making the rounds of meetings not only in Saarbrücken but in all the smallest villages to explain to people what they are letting themselves in for if they vote for Berlin.” (*Ibid.*) France was playing double or nothing.

„If France wins, she will not only obtain unquestionable economic advantages: the moral advantages will be even bigger. Not only will Clemenceau's affirmations be confirmed, but the vote will demonstrate that democratic France exercises a greater attraction on men's minds than Hitler totalitarianism.” (*Ibid.*)

It was the greatest possible opportunity for the French to show the world that the Germans themselves loathed Hitler.

„Here,” Benoist-Méchin writes in conclusion, „the people of a territory that is not under their control, and where their information comes to them only via the radio, are going to be called upon to say whether they prefer to be free, to be connected with France, or to go back to the bosom of the Reich. Who does not see that their choice will be equivalent to a verdict, and that it is not Germany but the Hitler regime that will be on trial?” (*Ibid.*) the fight was all the easier to conduct inasmuch as up to then the National Socialists of the Saar, closely watched, had not been able to carry on any effective propaganda: in the regional elections of 13 March 1932, before the accession of Hitler to power, they had obtained only 2 seats out of 30.

And as for Hitler himself, what was his position in this matter of the Saar? Contrary to everything one might believe, it was not bellicose in the slightest. Essentially it was directed at conciliation. In his view, the Saar was the stake which, instead of pitting France and Germany against each other, could offer them grounds for reconciliation.

Each of them, to be sure, if stubborn, could make a maximum effort in the certainty of victory. But who was really sure of obtaining it? And what would victory serve if it angered the loser even more?

A plebiscite could only lead to dangerous confrontations and rub sensitivities raw. It would be a hundred times more favorable and profitable to find arrangements guaranteeing the French that they would maintain material profits in the Saar even if they lost the territory.

As early as 1933, Hitler had proposed entering into negotiations over the Saar directed at seeking an amicable arrangement.

„Hitler,” wrote Sorbonne professor J.B. Duroselle in these exact words, „asked the French government in vain to waive the plebiscite (November, 1933).” (*Op. cit.*, p. 176).



After the people of the Saar voted in 1935 to reject the Treaty of Versailles and liberate themselves from France and Britain, German troops – including this SA unit – entered its capital, Saarbrücken, and returned the Saarland to Germany.

CHAPTER 21

THE SAARLAND VOTES TO JOIN GERMANY

In 1934 the date for the plebiscite in the Saar was drawing near. Hitler renewed his proposal most energetically, and with this end in view extended an invitation to meet with him to French Ambassador Andre François-Poncet, whose sly maneuvers he dreaded while appreciating his intelligence and sense of diplomacy. He offered to forestall a conflict, if only a psychological one, by concluding an accord by mutual agreement that would be favorable to both parties.

Personally, he was sure of gaining the victory – and events proved him right – but to avoid a conflict he was disposed to allow France – even after she had gone from the Saar territory militarily and politically – to enjoy the same material advantages she had reaped while in control of the region.

Hitler's official offer could not have been more clear the Saar would become German again, but an economic treaty would permit French industry to have the benefit of the resources of the Saar under the same conditions as formerly. (Benoist-Méchin, *op. tit.*, p. 257).

That proposal ought to have made them think That way at least France did not risk losing everything. She was guaranteed very considerable material profits by the agreement.

In the case of a defeat she could be frustrated completely.

This goodwill gesture of Hitler's provoked just the opposite, an outburst of intransigence: as the French government saw it, if Hitler was ready to cast aside a considerable material benefit in that fashion, it was because he felt he was going to be beaten when the time came for voting.

At Paris they said: „Would Hitler give up the plebiscite if he were sure of winning? So now, less than ever is this the time to grant him concessions.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 257).

Forty days before the vote on the League of Nations proposal, Hitler one last time renewed in writing his offer to pay France, in the event the plebiscite went against her, a financial compensation of 900 million francs as a *quid pro quo* for the Saar benefits she would lose.

France was absolutely sure of herself. Sure at least that if a majority of the Saar voters did not choose to become definitively French, at worst they would declare for a *status quo* such as the Saar Marxists recommended. And that form of discreet dependency would maintain and even ensure continuity of the past that had been so very lucrative for France.

In that certainty, Paris refused any agreement whatsoever and demanded they vote.

To maintain her position by force and to frighten possible pro-German voters, France massed sizable contingents of troops on the Franco-Saar border. „The situation,” Benoist-Méchin wrote, „is as tense as on the eve of the occupation of the Ruhr.” (*Ibid.*)

Hitler took a radically opposite countermeasure. He forbade all public activity of the SA and the SS within forty kilometers of the Saar border with Germany. National Socialists could not even wear their party uniforms within this large area of the Reich.

As for Hitler personally, he had been bluntly forbidden by the occupying power to speak in Saar territory. He, the chancellor of the Reich, could not enter a territory of the Reich.

He did not protest. Not once during the entire plebiscite campaign would he hold a single meeting with his 812,000 fellow citizens of the Saar – an enormous advantage for his opponents, for everyone knew Hitler’s words were irresistible.

In this way, it was said, the voters of the Saar would not be in danger of being turned aside from a solution favorable to France or to the *status quo*.

No measure taken to avoid a „German” vote would be considered excessive. The refugees of the extreme left would be given free rein.

In Paris, the leader of the French socialists, the Jew Léon Blum, echoed them frenetically: „The workers will rise to resist the Hitler aggression.” (Churchill, *L’Orage approche*, p. 131). On five occasions the French authorities would order the armed forces to charge and disperse public demonstrations favoring union with the Reich.

„The Saar,” Benoist-Méchin again writes, „has become a veritable powder keg; a spark would be enough to make it explode.”

The military occupation was transformed into a multinational deployment

British and Italian troops had been sent to join the French troops. The streets of the Saar were lined with Scottish soldiers dressed in kilts, marching to the cadence of their bagpipes; of heavily armed French, provided even with tanks; of swarthy Italians with lofty plumes! A strange „democratic“ plebiscite, under the round eye of rifles and cannon!

Civil and military authority was in the hands of the foreigner. This government of the Saarlanders by non-Saarlanders was presided over by a Frenchman.

The keenest representatives of the anti-German press of Paris had been sent running to the rescue.

They would even be seen taking part in socialist meetings.

The special correspondent of *L'Oeuvre* recounts: „I accept, and come evening I accompany these courageous men into a whole series of little villages where, on modest platforms, insignia of the Front de la Liberte and the red flag with white darts are intermingled with the flag of the Saar.

„Ovations are given me a few times at some of the meetings; my few encouraging sentences in bad German brought forth the *Marseillaise* sung awkwardly with a German accent.“ (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, p. 225).

One can imagine the spectacle!

Thus, supported by the anti-Hitler turncoats and by the pen holders of Paris, the Marxists of Saarbrücken felt sure of their affair:

‘They count on at least 40% of the votes,’ Max Braun, the Socialist leader, told the French press. A part of the Saar at the very least will remain independent as at present. And that will be a terrible blow to Hitler!’

„The friends of the German front may tear up our posters all the time,“ Communist Fritz Pfordt stated, „but, believe me, we have solid and serious troops.“ (G. Tabouis, pp. 227f).

Nevertheless, impelled by professional curiosity, our intrepid Parisian journalists had a hankering to go and see how the partisans of Hitler Germany were doing – a lost cause in advance, to be sure!

But strangely, though they themselves are politely received, the reception given by the crowd to the non-Marxist orators is not what the big shot French journalists expected.

„We come into a very small town where immense spotlights illuminate the facade of a building with white columns decorated with long garlands of laurel and a profusion of Nazi flags. We go in. With makeshift means, the staging is grandiose. The hall, which we sense to be vast, is dark. The projectors floodlight a large stage decorated with a sea of Nazi flags surrounding a gigantic portrait of the Führer and the German eagle." (*Ibid.*) the orators – insolent fellows – proclaim their conviction of victory. „Between each of these affirmations, the dark unseen audience is felt to be moving. One senses an immense fervor seizing these invisible beings. Patriotic songs alternate with „Heil Hitlers." I feel myself crushed.... In the bus on the way back, my German colleagues become sarcastic: ‘*Eh bien, Madame Tabouis, are you still going to write that the Front de la Liberte will have 40% of the votes, as you did this morning!?*'" (*Ibid.*)

„Why not?" she dryly replies. (*Ibid.*)

Somewhat acidulous, our special correspondent of the Paris left-wing press.

But who laughs last, laughs best, she says to herself.

The big day arrived.

It was Sunday, the 13th of January, 1935.

They were zealous to the point of setting a foreigner instead of a Saarlander at the head of each polling place. Thus it was under the eye of a non-Saarlander that the Saar was going to make its pronouncement.

The French journalists ran from street to street, from polling office to polling office.

From the start, they would know astonishing disappointments. The propaganda was not very modem; it was even rather feeble:

„We come across a horse-drawn vehicle, an old 1900 coupe with a team of two big horses that an old coachman wearing a tall black hat is conducting in a dignified manner. The driver says to us: it is one of the carriages of the domanial mines of the Saar that carries an elector. I think it really symbolizes French policy and propaganda, so slow and old-fashioned." (*Ibid.*) Such regrettable nonchalance might minimize the importance of the success, but of the latter in any event there was not the slightest doubt Counting of the vote took place the next day. Ye gods, what a catastrophe!

„As early as nine o'clock," our intrepid journalist notes, „the bulletins of the

'German Front' are just beginning to come in when Nazi flags appear one after another in the windows of the town. Around four o'clock in the afternoon, it becomes evident that the 'German Front' is carrying 90% of the vote. Only 9% for the Front de la Liberte. Not even one percent for France!

The church bells immediately begin to ring, and the town is now just a sea of flags! In the streets which are resounding with Hitlerian hymns, the Nazis are distributing postcards with a wide black border all around: 'Death of Mr. *Status Quo*' and underneath: the family of Messrs. Max Braun, Fritz Pfordt.'

„In the street, a kind of infernal exhilaration has taken possession of the population. An enormous torchlight tattoo, a veritable river of fire, marches by to the sound of fifes and drums and the national hymns. One has the impression that an immense rapture has seized the entire Saar and that Hitler is God." (*Ibid.*)

The Brauns (socialists) and Pfordts (Communists), before scuttling off to France, pick up their papers at the union house.

„I make my way there very moved," writes the French journalist. I congratulate them on their courage. A tragic meeting of the vanquished!"

„The French evidently have nothing more to say. No one wants to carry my valise to the station. But a foreign journalist assists me. The two of us, jostled by a mob in ecstasy, arrive at the station somehow or other. And the train starts slowly for France, while for a long time yet I hear 'the Saar is German' and the 'Heil Hitlers'." (*Ibid.*)

The French press, which claimed to be so well informed, and the Paris politicians so absolute in their judgments: would they now at least, after the disaster of the Saar, draw any intelligent conclusions from the event?

The plebiscite had just given all of them a striking lesson: in politics it is no use force-feeding the public with lies; they quickly develop indigestion.

Until the 13th of January 1935, it had been all the rage after every election or plebiscite in Hitler Germany right away to shout: „It's a scam! The results have been faked!"

Here, before everyone's eyes, the proof could not have been more convincing. Everyone had to acknowledge it: they had voted in a region that was totally controlled by non-Germans. The government of the area had been in the hands of foreigners. They had money and blackmail at their disposal: the laboring masses of the Saar – 80% of the population – were totally dependent upon the salaries that the

domanial mines allotted them. Foreign troops and their tanks lined the streets.

Hitler, chancellor though he was of the whole of German territory, had not been able to enter the Saar, a German province, even once. Not a single voter could have been affected by his personal charisma. Even the polling places had been presided over and supervised by foreigners.

Not the slightest pressure by Hitler was possible!

Well, then, what had happened? The Germans of the Saar, under French authority, under Franco-Anglo-Italian military occupation, under the scrutiny throughout the voting day of a foreigner presiding over the proceedings, had voted exactly like the Germans inside Germany. The figures were the same: 90%!

Everything should have urged the Saar voters to hesitate: their material interests, as well as the prospect of reentering a Reich that had only just raised itself out of the ruins; the fear, as part of greater Germany, of running into further international complications, of being subject to the power of that Hitler who had constantly been painted as the worst of monsters. They had voted: and the entire Saar had flung itself into the arms of the monster!

There were not even any loopholes: not only had Hitler carried 90% of the votes; the defeat of his adversaries completely surpassed what anyone could have imagined.

The Marxist opposition, in a fundamentally working class area, where Socialists and Communists had normally been able to win far more than an absolute majority, had obtained only 8.8% of the vote, despite the fact that they had only advocated a timid „*status quo*.“ They had not even won over a tenth of the voters. That was not a defeat; the Marxists had been swept away by Hitler’s broom.

As for the French, their rout was scarcely believable. They had proclaimed that fifty thousand Saarlanders at least were fiercely French and would surely elect a French deputy in the event of elections. And now look! After fifteen years of power and propaganda, here was the result: out of 860,000 Saarlanders, only 2,124 and not one more had voted for union with France.

„In Paris, where everyone was confident of success, the results of the balloting are a terrible disappointment,” observes Benoist-Méchin. „What happened to the 150,000 French Saarlanders Clemenceau alluded to?” (*op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 258).

One cannot conceive of a more absolute debacle. Despite the fact that everything possible had been done to thwart him, that confounded Hitler had

obtained 220 times as many votes as the French! „In Berlin,” Benoist-Méchin is obliged to note, „the decision of the Saar evokes an indescribable enthusiasm. For hours, crowds file past beneath the balcony of the Chancellery cheering the Führer.” (Ibid.)



„Back to the Fatherland!“, announces this poster, distributed by the National Socialists in the Saar just prior to the plebiscite in which 91 % of the population voted to reunite with Germany. Only about half a percent of the population voted for union with France, while about 9% voted for continuing British-French rule as an autonomous territory under the League of Nations.

It was the conclusive demonstration – agreeable or not – that the German people were for Hitler whether they were in an unfree part of the Reich or in the free part itself, and that contrary to what had been noisily trumpeted in the world press, the earlier plebiscites in Germany proper had been absolutely correct, inasmuch as in the Saar, said to be French, give or take, they had been exactly the same.

The most elementary ethics ought to have led the official historians to record the evidence honestly. But as always, while pretending objectivity, they hastened to conjure away the facts.

That was nothing new. Hitler had put more than four million unemployed back to work. It was a formidable accomplishment, unique in Europe: silence! Comment on it would have been embarrassing.

The same abstention with respect to the Saar. Only Churchill, half one thing and half another, dared a more-or-less correct interpretation of the Saar election.

„The plebiscite,” he wrote, „took place on Jan. 13, 1935 under international supervision, including an English brigade, and that little enclave, which represented along with Danzig the only territory embodying the sovereignty of the League of Nations, asked by a vote of 90.03% that it be returned to Germany. This moral

triumph of National Socialism, although it is only the outcome of a normal and inevitable evolution, augments Hitler's prestige; and, thanks to that candid experiment, his authority could emerge as the expression of the will of the German people." (Churchill, *L'Orage appmche*, p. 109).

The French press took care above all not to make the slightest reference to the precise coincidence established by the plebiscites within and outside of the Reich. It quickly eliminated the Saar vote and its embarrassing result from its news columns. It was almost as if it had never existed.

The French historian Thillier devoted only a fourth of a page to it; his compatriot Brissaud, two-thirds of a page; the Sorbonne professor, Renouvin, one page; this colleague J.B. Duroselle, two and a half pages out of 871.

French historian Benoist-Méchin was the only one of the lot who would venture to give, in his *History of the German Army*, a brief but objective and honest commentary:

„The figures of the plebiscite held under international supervision are identical to those of the plebiscites previously carried out inside Germany. That is surely proof that it was not faked. But beyond that: the return of the Saar is an indication fraught with significance. The attraction of the Reich has been revealed to be stronger than all the adverse propaganda. The moment a German population separated from the Reich by a decision of the victors was able to express itself freely, it manifested its will to rejoin its original homeland. That is a lesson Berlin will not forget" (op. cit, vol. III. p. 258).

But one that all the others will forget!

The people, in 1935, noses buried in their newspapers, could know only what representatives of the media, often for hire, wanted them to know – distorting, withholding, or blowing up the facts to please or displease: an illustration, among a hundred others, of the camouflage and systematic fakery that were the rule before the Second World War.

Hitler, on the night of this plebiscite, might well have been noisily exultant, like the German people. Instead, his reaction was that of a statesman who looks beyond a personal satisfaction. Having won, he was able to allow himself a magnanimous gesture, and he did so. He at once announced that he would ever remain ready to respect French interests in the Saar, that he had no wish to weaken France in any way, above all not in a way affecting her territorial integrity.

How? He pledged his word in advance to abandon any claim to the sacrosanct

Alsace-Lorraine, which was German before 1918, lost at Versailles in 1919, and a source of incessant brawls between France and Germany for two centuries.

Despite his close ties to the official system, Prof. Renouvin of the Sorbonne had reproduced the text of that offer made by Hitler on the day after the plebiscite:

„That the plebiscite went off without any untoward incident is a favorable sign. A decisive step has been taken on the path of reconciliation between our peoples. From this time forward, Germany will make no further territorial demands on France of any kind.” (Renouvin, *Les crises du Vingtieme siecle*, vol. n, p. 67).

With head bowed, Hitler would solemnly repeat that offer on the first of March 1935.

He had made an identical offer to Italy several years before with regard to Trentino that had been respected by both sides.

In the same fashion he was offering an olive branch to France. The gesture cost him a good deal. Alsace-Lorraine was dear to the German people, but Hitler was a realist. His great plan for expansion, the only one worthwhile, was to the East. To assure himself one day of five hundred thousand to a million square kilometers of land, he was prepared to renounce forever, however bitter, a stump of German territory to the west of the Reich – Alsace-Lorraine – as he had given up another piece of German territory to the Italians to the south of the Brenner Pass.



Adolf Hitler reorganized the German Navy as the Kriegsmarine in 1935, part of the general rearmament of Germany. Hitler had envisioned a navy centered around four aircraft carrier battlegroups, but was forced to shelve those plans when war broke out. Here he is present during a demonstration of Germany Naval artillery in Kiel in 1935.

CHAPTER 22

THE ANGLO-GERMAN NAVAL TREATY

“Germany,” Hitler declared before the 500 deputies of the Reichstag, “solemnly renounces all claim to Alsace-Lorraine. After the return of the Saar, the Franco-German border can be considered definitely fixed.” Prof Jean-Baptiste Duroselle of the Sorbonne could not completely erase this speech. The few lines he did publish in his *Histoire Diplomatique* are edifying:

„We hope the return of the Saar to the Reich will once and for all ameliorate relations between France and Germany. Just as we wish for peace, we think the great neighboring people, too, are prepared to seek peace. We hope we shall join hands in this common endeavor that will ensure the security of Europe.” (*Histoire Diplomatique de 1919 a nos jours*, p. 179).

But who, at Paris, would take any notice of this historic offer?

After her defeat in the Saar and notwithstanding Hitler’s conciliatory words, France persisted in wrapping herself in proud silence.

„France,” Benoist-Méchin remarks, „refuses to resume negotiations on that basis. She remains faithful to the *status quo* and to collective security, without realizing, as Lord Tyrell will say, ‘that she is wearing mourning for a shadow’.” (*op. cit.*, vol. UI, p. 262).

France had seen descending on her some thousands of Marxists and Israelites who, on the day following the plebiscite, had skedaddled out of the Saar. She had received them without warmth. They were a nuisance and little to be trusted. The refugees themselves were astonished and irritated to be so ill received. Many would find themselves, in May 1940, in the very harsh French concentration camps (seldom mentioned in later years) into which the refugees from Germany, men, women and children, were crammed by the tens of thousands in the utmost privation.

The official reply of the French government to Hitler would be given in a sensational turn of events: on the first of March, 1935, the quondam prime minister, M. Pierre Etienne Flandin, asked the French Chamber of Deputies to enact legislation that would increase the term of military service to two years. It was adopted by a majority of the French deputies on March 16, 1935.

Hitler could not allow himself to be thus affronted. Since his peaceful overtures

were so churlishly refused, he responded tit for tat: on the same 16th of March, he had the Council of Ministers of the Reich approve a „law for the rebuilding of the Reichswehr.“

No notice whatsoever had been taken of his repeated offers of reconciliation. The British, the French, the Poles, the Czechs were all increasing their armed forces. Against whom, if not against Himself?

The inevitable German response would be that law which set up a real German army once again. It would no longer be limited to the miserable contingent of 100,000 men imposed by Versailles, but would become a half a million soldiers strong.

The text was short, three little paragraphs: „Art. 1. Service in the Wehrmacht is on a basis of compulsory military service; Art. 2. The German army, in time of peace, comprises 12 army corps, 36 divisions; Art. 3. Complementary legislation regulating the compulsory military service will be submitted to the Cabinet in the near future by the Minister of the Reichswehr.“ (*Reichsgesetzblatt [Official Journal]*, 1935, vol. I, p. 375).

The Treaty of Versailles, hitherto many times flouted by its own signatories, now burst into pieces.

The indignation, Hitler knew, would be tremendous.

But he lacked neither flair nor astuteness. He had told himself that only by dividing his adversaries would he take the sting out of their reaction. The British might have – and did have – interests that were sometimes different than those of the French. On the ocean for example.

Since they forced him to it, why should Hitler not play the game of these opposing interests?

Egoists by inclination, the British, he was sure, would not fail to jump with both feet at any possibility he offered them of guaranteeing their maritime superiority. Throughout their entire history, that had been their preferred objective.

In great secrecy Hitler was going to put them to the test.

The negotiations proposed by Hitler would be conducted in London without the knowledge of France. The latter would not learn of their conclusion until the 18th of June, 1935, a most symbolic date that marked the anniversary of the victory won on June 18, 1815 by the English and the Prussians joined as brothers in arms to destroy Napoleon at Waterloo.

It was on that anniversary day that the Anglo-German naval treaty would be signed behind Paris's back.

A good many Britishers, in 1936, were not yet anti-German. Besides, they had always had an aversion to being anti-anything. They were pro-British. For centuries their foreign policy derived its inspiration from taking that fundamental position. In Europe, they can just as well be pro-German as anti-German, pro-French as anti-French. A European country becomes strong? They are against it. It becomes weak? They are for it!

In order not to overshadow them, Europe should be a complex of countries in which they all counterbalance each other downward. It is only insofar as nothing brings the continental forces into alliance that Great Britain feels herself secure from any rival, whether a threat or merely a nuisance.

Churchill, who although half American was the archetypal British bulldog, had even then said it in definitive terms: „For 400 years, England's policy has been to oppose the strongest of the continental powers... It didn't matter to her who this power was; it was sufficient that it appeared to seek dominance.... Let us hence not fear the accusation of being pro-French or anti-German. If the circumstances were to change, we should be pro-German and anti-French... The question to be asked today is that of knowing which is the strongest European power.” (Jacques Chastenet *Winston Churchill et l'Angleterre du XXeme stecl*e, pp. 296f).

Since Joan of Arc and Philip n, every Briton has surely carried that axiom before him like a shield. Deaf is he who hears it not; blind, who sees it not.

At the beginning of 1935 Germany was only at the beginning of her recovery. She was not nearly so strong as France, and since the latter's venture into the Ruhr, England feared a continental hegemony.

In 1935, therefore, it appeared highly desirable to all normal Englishmen that the United Kingdom should temporarily reinforce the German counterpoise in order to limit any French expansionism in Europe.

„What they would like,” a French academician writes, „is that those claims which seem legitimate – they are thinking notably of the Danzig corridor – be given immediate satisfaction, without, waiting for it to be taken by force.... Satisfying the just grievances of the vanquished should precede the disarmament of the victors... It is infinitely better to raise the question of a partial revision of the territorial clauses of the Versailles Treaty. But it must be done calmly, in an atmosphere of serenity, and while the victorious nations still possess a superiority of armaments.” (Jacques Chastenet, *op. cit.*, p. 261).

At bottom, Churchill was not and never had been Hitler's enemy when it comes to that. If Hitler had been English instead of being German, he would have been enchanted. The only thing he held against him was his not being British. But when Hitler had the bad idea of setting up his chancellorship in Berlin instead of in London, he was automatically due sooner or later to become an enemy to be destroyed.

With Mussolini it would be just the same.

Churchill admired him. He envied the Italians for having such a *dues*. But not being English, Mussolini, without any intention of doing so, offended British supremacy. An insignificant head of government, in Paris, in Rome, in Berlin, served London's purposes to perfection. A genius is a person whose existence, outside of the British empire, all worthy Englishmen mean to inhibit.

British reasoning was based, as always, on the simple matter of the interests at issue. After 1918 it was better to favor a weakened Germany, whatever the momentary irritation of the French. It was more intelligent and above all more profitable to satisfy „the just grievances of the vanquished“ than to see them taken by force without having first been able to cash in on them while there was still time.

When Churchill first began to oppose the plan of conciliating Hitler, he had been forced to come up against the opinion of a British public far less prepared than he was to sacrifice their tranquility, and above all their skins, in order to permit the resurrection of ancient European quarrels.

One test had been significant.

In the by-elections in the district of East Fulham, the partisans of disannament and the partisans of a nascent bellicosity had met each other head on. The leader of the Labour Party at that time, Mr. George Lansbury, had declared that „all nations should disarm to the same level as Germany in order to arrive next at total disarmament“.

The Conservative candidate, who in this election of East Fulham had wished to pass himself off as a lesser Churchill, had been thoroughly trounced: he had lost 10,000 votes, while the partisan of peace by disarmament had gained 9,000.

„This passionate desire for peace,“ Churchill himself had to admit, „animated the great mass of the British people.“

The head of the Liberals, Sir Archibald Saint Clair, would go still further: „It is imperative to call a new economic conference, not only to bring Germany into the

political concert of nations, but to get her to collaborate with us.”

On March 16, 1935, after the rejection by Paris of Hitler’s conciliatory offers and the French decision to increase her term of military service to two years, Hitler had felt driven to proceed with rearmament, though still on a limited scale. And it was then precisely that the British people had been called upon to voice an opinion on the uselessness or the necessity of an increase in, or even simply of the maintenance of, the existing level of armaments.

Churchill, who for the past year had arrogated unto himself the „privilege” of demanding on behalf of the United Kingdom an increase in their armed forces, had been shaken up by the results of the East Fulham election. In his book *The Gathering Storm*, he crabily described how important a much more extensive opinion poll of the British nation had become after that by - election.

„In the first months of 1935,” he writes, „a referendum had been arranged on collective security and the support that had to be given to the Charter of the League of Nations. The plan had been approved by the League of Nations Union, but it was sponsored by an independent organization largely supported by the Labour Party and the Liberal Party.” this „referendum for peace” specifically asked the Britons: „Are you in favour of a general reduction of armaments by international agreement? Are you in favour of a general elimination of national armies and navies by international agreement?”.

Churchill could only add with very painful surprise: „It was announced on June 27 that more than 11 million persons had given an affirmative response to this questionnaire.” (Churchill, *L’orage approche*, p. 112).

Eleven million! The figure was overwhelming. The real England did not want to hear talk of conflict with the Germans over armaments she disapproved of.

„It seems to me,” Churchill had the presumption to declare during a session of the House of Commons, setting public opinion at defiance, „we are nearing the moment when attempting to make certain elements of public opinion listen to reason will become pointless.”

From then on, in order to „make them listen to reason,” he would begin systematically to foment agitation, to invent imaginary perils, with the result he surely expected of distracting and bewildering the British public.

But who in Europe, in God’s name, in 1935, could have had the slightest designs on Great Britain? Nary a German, Frenchman, or anyone else on the planet was thinking of going to London to steal a penny from an Englishman’s pocket!

Churchill nonetheless declared: „We are a rich and easy prey; no country is so vulnerable, and no other country would be more pleasant to plunder than ours... With our enormous metropolis, the biggest target in the world, like an enormous milk cow, fat and precious, tethered like bait for beasts of prey, we find ourselves in an unprecedented situation.” (Op. cit, p. 116).

The image of those „beasts of prey” seizing the udder of the „enormous milk cow, fat and precious,” of Britain is not lacking in the picturesque. For five years Churchill, with an overflowing imagination, would hammer away at inventing more and more fabulous beasts – all Hitlerian, to be sure – ready to devour the swollen udders of his compatriots.

Alas, the exaggerations would prove to be not just comical. The British public – and even the French – would end up believing these bogeyman stories, and the comic would become tragic. War would be the only beast of prey. And Churchill would do everything in his power, from 1934 to 1939, to let it out of its cage.

It would take time.

In the spring of 1935 the British public had not yet fallen into the tiger trap. Many Britishers, on the contrary, were on the lookout for any possibility of maintaining the peace. Hitler, realizing as much, and with his customary know-how, had not failed to extend a friendly hand to all those Englishmen who refused to go out of their way looking for war.

He was not pleased at having to note that no country had agreed to disarm even by so much as a hand grenade. And even before Hitler had become chancellor, French Prime Minister Joseph Paul-Boncour had been forced to admit an interminable refusal on the part of other nations to disarm would inevitably lead Germany to kicking over the traces:

„One does not by any means have to be a prophet to perceive that in the event of final failure of the labors of the disarmament conference, or even of their indefinite adjournment, Germany, freed of other restraints, will no longer accept being the only one subject to arms limitations which the treaty itself specified to be the condition and also the promise of a reduction by all.” (Statement published in *„le Journal”* of Paris, April 26, 1930).

After eight years of hypocritical twisting and turning by the Geneva delegates, Hitler had really been compelled to respond to the last convening of the French assembly in 1935 (military service increased to two years) by announcing the re-establishment of a German army which he would nonetheless limit to 36 divisions, that is to say, to barely half of the armed forces of his most dangerous enemy and

neighbor, the USSR.

A month later, on April 15, 1935, to give food for thought to jingoists like Churchill, Hitler had also announced that he had included in his program the construction of a few seagoing vessels and of 20 submarines.

As for aircraft, Germany was still only just working on the first models of future military planes.

Hitler also hastened to maintain his offers to participate in any form of disarmament, with the proviso as always – and approved moreover by the recent British referendum – that the Reich would be admitted on an equal basis by the other countries.

Speaking before the Reichstag on May 21, 1935, the German chancellor was anxious to make clear and definitive the breadth of his proposals.

He laid them out in several precise points:

„Following the refusal of the other states to disarm, the German government freed itself of the articles of the treaty which for the German nation represented a discrimination without limitation of term. The German government solemnly declares, however, that it will respect the articles concerning the communal life of nations.” (Official German text reprinted by Benoist-Méchin, *op. oil.*, pp. 260f).

He committed himself in advance to „carry out every treaty freely signed,” and to „signify [liis] adhesion to an air convention to supplement the Locarno Pact”.

A statement of the various commitments was straightforward:

- „The German government is prepared as a matter of principle to conclude a non-aggression pact with each of the neighboring states.
- „It is prepared at all times to impose limitations on its armaments that would be acceptable to the other states as well.
- „The German government is prepared to participate actively in any efforts undertaken with a view to a practical limitation of armaments. It considers that the best means of attaining it is to return to the principles of the former Geneva Convention of the Red Cross.
- „The German government is prepared to approve any limitation having as its aim the abolishment of heavy offensive weapons (heavy artillery and tanks).”

(Ibid.)

- However, to keep France from feeling any anxiety, Hitler conceded that she could keep her Maginot Line intact, thereby gaining a defensive monopoly to the west
- „Given the formidable fortifications erected by France along her borders, such an abolishment would automatically ensure France absolute security.” (Ibid.)

CHAPTER 23

A GREAT MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The biggest surprise of the points enunciated by Hitler before the Reichstag on May 21, 1935 would be the official announcement of the offer to limit Germany's future fleet to only 35% of the tonnage of the British fleet.

- „The German government recognizes of its own accord the vital importance and the legitimacy of the naval preponderance of the British empire.
- „The German government intends to do everything possible to establish and maintain relations with the United Kingdom of such a nature as to forever prevent the recurrence between these two peoples of a conflict like that of 1914-1918, the only one thus far that has seen them pitted against each other.” (*Ibid.*)

France, faithful to her inflexible policy of opposition, immediately responded with a categorical „no.”

But on the British side, the 65% credited to his majesty's fleet had made the utmost impression. Even the sedate *Times* had responded on May 22, 1935 with an effusive editorial:

„No unbiased person can question the fact that Hitler's thirteen points could serve as a basis for a definitive settlement of our relations with Germany.”

Moreover, in British government circles there had not really been any surprise. The British Cabinet ministers had months since been very confidentially made aware by the Germans of this project. Hitler, intuitively sensing the international obstacles he faced, had attempted to divert British animosity by concessions on the sea that Wilhelm II had refused to grant in 1914.

From the beginning of his activities, Hitler had an overall plan. He had prepared to build a true Germanic community. For him, the two peoples, born of the same race, had each a proper area of expansion: Great Britain on the oceans, the Reich on the continent.

That conception, to be sure, did not entirely correspond to that of the classic

Englishman. It went beyond their age-old leanings toward monopoly and did not take into account their honor of a strong continent. But Hitler, a revolutionary to the core, even in international policy, was determined to sweep away such antiquated exclusivism with any and all useful concessions and arrive at a division of roles between two equally enterprising peoples set in opposition to each other only by outworn prejudices and egoisms.

Throughout his life Hitler would steadfastly pursue the realization of that new conception of the Western World.

In May of 1940, he was given the possibility at Dunkirk of easily destroying the military forces of Great Britain. Such a defeat would probably have left the fanatic Churchill without the means of continuing the war he had so eagerly sought.

But Hitler, in May of 1940, was looking much farther ahead: to the indispensable reconciliation that a humiliating defeat of the British at that point would have rendered much more chancy.

Again in May of 1941, in one last attempt at rapprochement, he would sacrifice his most faithful lieutenant, his Knight of the Sky, Rudolf Hess.

Even on the eve of his death in April 1945, he would again allude to the great missed opportunity which could have saved the white world.

The British, in fact, would lose World War II at least as much as Hitler did. They would see their empire sink into the abyss. They would lose almost all the feathers of theft proud peacock's tail. They would never again be able to strut and swagger as in the flamboyant centuries of their great ancestors, Nelson and Wellington and the imperial Jew, Benjamin Disraeli.

Brought back to their narrow isle, they would have at their command only a skimpy economy, eroded by unemployment, that would become inferior to that of Italy.

Even reduced to a third of its ground, Germany would recover much better than England from the disaster. In 1990, the second *Anschluss* of the century would take place, the return to the Reich of formerly sovietized East Germany, a first stage of resurrection.

Not wishing to wait until a great German victory at the time of the Saar plebiscite which might give rise to anxiety abroad, Hitler had in the previous October (1934) already quietly cast his net in the Thames.

Very discreetly he had sent an informal emissary, Herr von Ribbentrop, to London for the purpose of establishing the initial contacts and to dangle some attractive proposals about in the old wainscoted offices of Mr. Anthony Eden, Lord of the Privy Seal, and of Sir John Simon, the foreign secretary.

These offers had awakened interest.

On Jan. 25, 1935, two unofficial envoys of Great Britain came tiptoeing into Berlin, Lord Allen of Hurtwood and Lord Lothian, the former secretary of Lloyd George, the English victor of 1918.

On that occasion Hitler was clearly in a position of prestige. He had just won a great victory in the Saar. Like an Englishman, he had played fair. Hitler had won; London recognized it.

Hitler had received the „private“ visitors courteously. For the first time, he broached his naval plan of 35%. He placed it on the table like a tempting dish.

He said straight out that he recognized British supremacy on the seas. He was prepared to write it into a treaty.

In diplomacy, nothing is given for nothing. Four months later, when the Naval Agreement giving juridical status to the initial bargaining was signed, the British were not being led into a trap. At the first meeting, on Jan. 25, 1935, Hitler had let the two envoys clearly know what consideration it was he sought: as her *quid pro quo*, Germany, in keeping with her national traditions and in order no longer to be put in a humiliating position *vis-a-vis* the other countries, was to get a more powerful territorial army.

The fish had not yet struck, but the fishhook had been cast.

Against whom did Hitler intend to use the fishhook? Against France? Hitler had said it 20 times: injuring the French was totally excluded from his plans.

Then, against the British? But in that case, he would not have committed the imprudence of asking their acquiescence to an increase in Germany's military forces.

As regards the West, he would gladly dispense with all arms and with all troops. For Hitler, the sole danger he had to face lay in the East That was his great delusion.

Hitler had shown the two British envoys the obverse and the reverse sides of the coin he was offering: the reverse of the 35% was, for him, a free hand in the East.

As early as January 1935, therefore, the British knew all about the double purpose.

The British game as usual was subtle and full of nuances, not regarding either friends or treaties, just the single interest: the iron law of the City of London, the bankers.

Churchill would reveal in high dudgeon: „Discussions were begun some time ago between the British and German admiralities on the subject of the proportions to be observed between the two fleets. His Majesty’s government did it without consulting France, its ally, and without informing the League of Nations. At the very moment when this same government was appealing to the League of Nations and was obtaining the cooperation of its members to protest against the violation by Hitler of the military clauses of the Treaty, it was endeavoring through a private agreement to render the naval clauses of it null and void.” (Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 137).

It should be added that there wasn’t anything new about this: ships for England in the West, open space for Hitler in the East It had been spelled out in *Mein Kampf* 10 years earlier.

Brought up to date in detail by his emissaries, the British foreign secretary decided to go to Berlin himself on March 7, 1935.

He had thought beforehand to use intimidation.

Thus, on the very eve of his trip he had issued a „White Paper“ in London condemning the first attempts made by the Germans to rebuild their military, and announcing an acceleration of the rearmament of Britain’s airforce.

Hitler hit the ceiling. Intimidate him! At once he canceled the interview setup for the following day, March 7, with the British secretary.

Since Sir John Simon treated him that way on the very eve of their meeting, he would step up the pace and steal a march on the British: two days later he would officially announce that in view of the reinforcement of the British air force, he would develop his, too, this at a time when it had scarcely been created! Uppercut against uppercut!



Here, British Ambassador Sir Eric Phipps and Secretary of State Sir John Simon meet with Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs Konstantin Freiherr von Neurath and Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler. Phipps was a radical anti-German activist with whom Hitler's government often refused to meet; Simon was a „Nationalist Liberal“ in the British Parliament who played a major role in the suppression of Sir Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists. Their presence in Germany was a calculated British insult to Hitler.

Following in the footsteps of the British, the French a week later, on March 16, 1935, had made their famous two years of service official.

A second riposte by Hitler: on the same day, he ordered the reconstitution in Germany of three army corps, forces still clearly inferior to the military forces of the other nations. They would remain so, and by a wide margin, even in 1940.

But he proposed to compensate for this numerical inferiority by technical superiority, by a new art of warfare that the old generals over the way, their brains wedged in the past, would be incapable of imagining, or even simply understanding at the time when they would be struck by the evidence of the facts.

Hitler did not try to minimize the launching of his double riposte. On March 17, 1935, Berlin shook under the martial cadence of a great military parade baptized „the Day of Remembrance of our Heroes.“ Hitler had mobilized right down to the aged Marshal von Mackensen stuffed back into his moth-eaten Hussars uniform. The marshal went with Hitler and with all the surviving generals of 1914-1919 down the avenue Unter den Linden decorated with the glorious flags of the defeated. An enormous crowd cheered them. The new army of the Reich received the never extinguished torch of the past.

After these nearly instant ripostes of Hitler, what were the British going to do?

They were going to come along to Berlin all the same. Being a realist means accepting the facts. To come to Berlin was to ratify, in advance, the decisions of the Chancellor of the Reich. Secretaries Eden and Simon would arrive in the capital of Germany the same month.

Hitler awaited them resolutely but was in no way uncivil. He listened to them patiently and with extreme politeness.

Eden, who had expected to meet a kind of Papua New Guinea savage in the chancellery – with a bone in his nose and a stone ax in his fist – was surprised and even charmed. He did not conceal it.

The next day, when the British ministers reappeared at Hitler's office, their surprise would be extreme.

Simon, having asked Hitler a question about the extensiveness of Germany's air rearmament, he drew a response that left him stunned: „Germany has already attained equality of forces.“

It was not so at all. Hitler was bluffing. He was thoroughly versed in the art of tactics.

„The declaration,“ historian Joachim Fest has written, „had the effect of a shock and made the Englishman catch his breath. According to the story of one of the participants in these talks, no one said a word for several moments. The faces reflected doubt, surprise, and consternation. That was the decisive turning point. In that moment it was understood why Hitler had postponed the date of the talks until the air rearmament and the reintroduction of compulsory service had been made public: not being able to win England by the sole seduction of her armaments, he could give real weight to his proposals only by threat and pressure. It is arms that lead people to discuss.“ (*Hitler*, vol. n, pp. 138f).

If that was really the way things stood, the British ministers were saying to themselves, it was more urgent than ever to discuss and negotiate. If they still hung back, they could only see the threat getting worse.

Was this Hitler, seemingly already so strong and determined, prepared to agree that his fleet should always remain inferior to that of the English? The rest of it was much less important! the fleet was the backbone of England. It was better to be calm on that side, since an agreement concerning this is still possible.

Much impressed and coldly realistic, the two British ministers concluded in a few minutes that an agreement on that basis was of great interest to their country.

„The principle clause of this agreement,” Churchill would acknowledge, „was the commitment made by Germany not to increase her fleet to more than a third of the British fleet. This commitment greatly captivated the Admiralty, who were going back to the days before the Great War when they were contented with a ratio of six to 10.”

Hitler, Eden and Simon quickly came to an agreement to have a following meeting in London, where a definitive text would be worked out Ribbentrop would proceed there in Hitler’s name in the month of June. They congratulated each other.

An extraordinary occurrence: At the end of the sojourn of the British ministers, Hitler was invited to the Berlin embassy of His British Majesty. He went there with quite a retinue, accompanied by Goering, by Goebbels and by Ribbentrop.

How would they be received? The British ambassador, Sir Eric Phipps, had lined up his children in the large ceremonial drawing room. Upon Hitler’s entrance, they saluted him, their little arms held out Hitler fashion!

You have to read and reread the accounts of the historians to believe it really happened that way. Even someone like Fest can only note with amazement this so significant behavior: „Hitler proceeded to the British embassy with Goering, Goebbels, Ribbentrop and a few members of his Cabinet The master of the house, Sir Eric Phipps, had already assembled his children in the large drawing room: they raised their little arms to give the Hitler salute and cried out a timid ‘Heil’.”

The London theater was ready for the last act.

The British, as old soccer champions, had told themselves that a- turn match on their home field would give them an advantage.

They no doubt counted on squeezing a few additional little concessions out of the Germans.

Hitler had sensed their game; and he had also laid down to Ribbentrop the limits he had set on his participation.

„Tell the British that my offer to limit the German fleet to 35% of the total tonnage of the British fleet is a unique and irrevocable proposal that I shall not renew. It cannot in any case be used as a basis for bargaining. If the British imagine that they can get me to bring that proposal down to 33% or 25%, after having dragged things out for several years, they are merely deceiving themselves. The 35% is not a final objective. Their acceptance of it is the preliminary condition of all negotiation.” (Benoist- Méchin, op. *ciL*, vol. ID, p. 263).

Ribbentrop was imperious by nature. At Downing Street, in the Foreign Office, the British had anticipated that a grand preliminary procession of the customary courtesies, followed by clever circumlocutions, would subtly lead to the possibility of improving on the ratio of 35%-65% envisaged by Berlin.

Then, abruptly, a shock! Ribbentrop was hardly seated when he drew himself up straight in his chair, cutting short any attempt to get round him with smooth-tongued blarney:

„As for our conditions, you may take them or leave them. If His Majesty's government is not disposed to accept them, it is useless to continue the talks. That point must be established before going any further." (*Ibid.*)

Foreign Secretary Simon could not have been more stupefied if the great Venetian chandelier had fallen right on his head.

He stood up, utterly indignant: 'That's inadmissible. You don't throw conditions down on the table that way before we've even begun negotiations.'

Never before had so lively an incident shattered the calm of the British Foreign Office, the temple of good form, beribboned proposals and polished hypocrisy. Sir John Simon had stiffened, become coldly hostile. Without so much as another glance at Ribbentrop, he made for the door. An usher showed Ribbentrop to the stairs.

CHAPTER 24

ENGLAND MOVES TOWARD WAR

Negotiations had been carried on for months, and Hitler would put an end to them with just a few words to Ribbentrop. This after so many ambassadors' reports; after Hitler himself had spent 10 years explaining that an Anglo-German entente would be the No. 1 priority of his grand political plans, that he would make the most dangerous concessions for its success. Ribbentrop's demands and his bluntness were only the stage setting; they were meant only to disconcert the Britishers, to hurry them up with an unexpected coup and then, in the ensuing scare, get them to give up any thought of modifying the future treaty in their favor.

Politics is a box of surprises. It is necessary to surprise the adversary as in a war, whether by an unexpected attack or by an original ruse. This is the ABC of all combat. And Hitler knew his ABCs.

The British fleet? Well, to convince the British – if they had been more discerning and hence tougher – Hitler would have let them have another 10 percent of tonnage, with less risk of failure.

The proof of it is that Hitler did not even even utilize completely the tonnage he demanded so brusquely and was to obtain.

He would build fewer ships than he was going to have granted him by the agreement. And not even half of the submarines.

Churchill would later note with astonishment:

„Germany had been authorized to construct five battleships, two aircraft carriers, 21 cruisers and 64 destroyers. In fact, all she had completed or close to completed when the hostilities began, were two ships of the line, 11 cruisers, 25 destroyers, and no aircraft carriers, that is to say, considerably less than half of what we had so obligingly conceded him,” (Churchill, the *Gathering Storm*, p. 138).

Churchill added: „The English [sic – the Germans?] could have put themselves in a more advantageous position for a war against Great Britain in 1939 or 1940.” (*Ibid.*)

That calculated act had as its goal first of all to show the British that the time of

dictating to Germany was over.

Hitler was a calculator. He no longer believed in the effectiveness of these monsters of the oceans that a simple torpedo could send to the bottom in a matter of minutes. Building a hundred tanks cost less in steel and manpower than a single destroyer. Ten armored divisions interested Hitler more than 10 cruisers. Having enough ships to ensure the defense of the Baltic Sea in the event of conflict with the USSR was sufficient for him.

So the Britishers had gone into a panic over a trifle. Ribbentrop's stunning gambit had succeeded. Whereas the day before everything had appeared to be lost, the next day the German minister was asked with great cordiality to come back to the British Foreign Office.

Benoist-Méchin tells us, a bit amused: „On the next day they invite Ribbentrop to resume the talks. This time the session takes place not in the Foreign Office, but in the Council Room of the Admiralty, where the decorations call back the annals of three centuries of British naval hegemony. At one end of the room lined with wainscoting of the 18th century, one sees a large compass card fastened to a weather vane that allowed the Lords of the Admiralty at the time of the sailing ships to prepare their plans of battle. A bit farther along, there is a notch marking Nelson's exact height cut into an oak panel. Nothing seems to have changed since Abukir and Trafalgar.

„His reception by the Englishmen is exceedingly friendly. The British delegation is composed of Sir Robert Craigie, Adm. Little and Capt. Dankwerts. Germany is represented by Ribbentrop, Adm. Schuster, Lt Cmdr. Kiderlen, Embassy Advisor Woermann, Capt. Wasmer, the naval attaché at London, and the Legation Advisor, Erich Kordt.

„At the beginning of the meeting, Sir Robert Craigie, permanent undersecretary of State of the Foreign Office, reads a short statement, to the very great surprise of the delegates of the Reich: it is an acceptance pure and simple of the German conditions.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-26G).

„The British fleet,” Churchill took pleasure in repeating, „always travels first class.” the less boastful Hitler had just taken it for a boat ride.

As anyone could have foreseen, when Paris learned of the Anglo-German naval agreement made behind her back, „there was great discontent in France,” as Duroselle chastely put it.

Not only was the date chosen for signing the agreement – the 18th of July,

Waterloo salt in the wound – but the Anglo-German naval pact thenceforth rendered impossible, even derisory, any claim against the Germans relative to any violation whatsoever of the Treaty of Versailles, since Great Britain had just trampled it herself when permitting Germany to have a war fleet, which the Treaty totally forbade.

Paris had trapped herself. Her total policy for 15 years had inflexibly consisted of enclosing Germany tightly in the corset of Versailles. Now the British had exploded it.

„The signing of the naval pact provoked very violent reactions in Paris,” notes Benoist-Méchin. „The French government did not hesitate to say she considered the British decision morally inadmissible and juridically untenable. Can one blame Germany for repudiating the clauses of the Treaty, when England herself helps her tear up the little of it that still remains. It will be a near thing if England is not accused of having betrayed her allies.” (*Ibid*).

Pierre Laval went running to demand an explanation of the British charge d'affaires: „I am not a gentleman, but I would not have acted as you have just done.”

Henri Beraud, the country's premier journalist, would even go so far as to write at the head of „*Gringoire*,” the most important weekly in France: „I say, and I repeat, that England must be reduced to slavery!”

Those reproaches and insults do not, however, bother England. Lord Londonderry, in the House of Lords on June 22, 1935, will just shrug his shoulders and respond: „We are a practical people who are in the habit of taking realities into account”.

„This day is the most beautiful day of my life,” says Hitler under his breath in Berlin.

He had won all along the line. He had managed to have the Treaty of Versailles shattered by one of the principal countries that had imposed it!

Benoist-Méchin observes that „for the first time, one of the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles had accepted the arguments of the Reich on disarmament.”

And the Sorbonne professor, Pierre Renouvin, remarks in turn: „That revision of the naval clauses of the Versailles Treaty, decided without the French government having been consulted, has created a precedent that German diplomacy will be able to make use of when she wishes to get out of the military clauses.” (*Les Crises du XXe siecle*, vol. n, p. 92).

Moreover, he had just set the English and the French, whose union had for years put him in real danger, against each other; and that also entered into his calculations.

Even Mussolini, always a joint partner of the Allies, and at that time still a violent opponent of all things German, had been very astonished by this double game and began to get angry. He had not foreseen it any more than the French. And he, too, felt it an affront.

Relations between London and Paris would no longer be as before. A cog in the anti-German machine had broken.

Historian Joachim Fest would write these disillusioned lines:

„It had to be acknowledged, not without irritation tinged with a certain respect, that Hitler was capable of breaking up the common front of his opponents and turning them one against another. Undoubtedly more astonishing again was the talent with which he immediately spread among the victors (after having done so among the losers) the growing consciousness of the untenable character of the system of peace which they themselves had solemnly proclaimed 15 years earlier.“ (Fest, *op. cit.*, vol. n,p.236).

In two months, Hitler had Versailles well in hand.

In order to maintain her policy of smothering Germany, France had always kept a ready arsenal at her disposal.

One of her preferred weapons since the end of 1918 had been the barrier of a „Little Entente“ which she had set up in the Southeast of Europe, and which, in reality, would always be a big *mesentente* [misunderstanding or disagreement].

In 1935, several links of this chain were already cracked. The French Minister Barthou had come back very disappointed from his round of visits to Warsaw, Bucharest and Belgrade. Only Belgrade had not – yet – abandoned the Republic.

Manifestly these demanding little allies of Central Europe who had been force-fed money and weapons by France for years were not eager to play the role of supplementary soldiers.

Another possibility had appeared, a much more important one, and one which fitted an historic tradition: Russia.

In 1914 she had saved the sly warmongering expert who was then president of

the republic, M. Raymond Poincaré: in the last days of August 1914, she had held several of the Kaiser's divisions on the Prussian border and had made Moltke, his chief of the general staff, lose his head.

Moltke had believed it necessary to pull back in all haste from the western front the two German army corps that were then nearing Paris. A needless withdrawal. They were still on the trains getting ready to leave when the Russians were crushed by Hindenburg and Ludendorff. But that Russian defensive had saved France. With those two additional army corps, Moltke would almost certainly have defeated the forces of Gen. Joffre.

Thanks to the 200,000 Russians killed, drowned or made prisoner at Tannenberg and the precipitate withdrawal of two army corps on the point of reaching Paris, at the beginning of September of 1914, France had been able at the last moment to stop the German army at the Marne.

The Russia of 1935 was no longer the Russia of 1917. But there was no change in her immense size. Or in her gigantic reservoir of manpower.

The Soviets who succeeded czarism had committed horrible crimes, murdered rebels by the millions. They ought therefore to have horrified the French, from whom moreover they had stolen 15 billion gold francs placed in Russia before the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

Winston Churchill, one of the few Englishmen in 1935 who were already inciting the French to crush Germany, had personally spoken of the revulsion that the Soviets inspired in him:

„Of all the tyrannies mentioned in history, Bolshevism is the most frightful, the most destructive, the most degrading.”

With his usual vigor of language, he had given a precise definition of this plague: „Bolshevism isn't a political doctrine. It is not a creation. It is an infection.” (Jacques Chastenet, *Winston Churchill*, p. 203).

He had even wanted to turn his words into actions.

Lloyd George wrote: „Winston Churchill, with his customary violence, showed himself to be a partisan of going to war against the Bolsheviks.” (*Ibid.*, p. 205).

Wars had always delighted this vociferous battler. Wherever they broke out, he went there, on the run. When wars didn't arrive fast enough, Churchill preached wars, or even provoked them, as would be seen in 1939.

A hundred times over, he'd had occasion to note that his frenzy for war was not to the taste of the British people. He knew perfectly well that nothing was more unpopular in Great Britain in 1935 than warmongering. And that every government that had at that tune advocated it had been turned out.

Prime Minister Baldwin had been frank to avow: „Supposing I had gone to the country and said that Germany was rearming and that we must, rearm, does anybody think that this pacific democracy would have rallied to that cry at that moment? I cannot think of anything that would have made the loss of the election from my point of view more certain.”

Churchill was just as persuaded of it as Baldwin. But public opinion, for him, was not a force to be respected, but an instrument to manipulate and utilize.

If England found herself one day with a war on her back, that was her business. His business was to make use of it as soon as possible as a battering ram.

A fight with Germany had become his main objective that year, ever since Hitler had started running things after 15 years of spineless government. Creating once again a country preponderant in Europe was in Churchill's eyes, as we know, a crime totally opposed to the strategy pursued by the British for centuries.

„It seems to me,” he had declared in the Commons to his colleagues of the Foreign Office, „that our national security depends on the coalition we can form to contain and, if necessary, defeat Germany's will to dominate.”

That being so, any enemy whatsoever would be welcome who could make the pesky German adhere to the long-standing doctrine that all occidental competitors must remain weak. You must even extend your hands to the still bloody hands of those horrible Soviets whom you previously criticized so severely.

„Sooner an alliance with the devil,” Churchill cried, „than a continental Europe dominated by a great power!”

If to „see Germany surrounded,” it was necessary to enlist the devil in your ranks, long live the devil and his red-hot pitchfork!

Why had France proved more papist than this old Anglican? Even before the plebiscite of the Saar, Paris, no more particular than Churchill, had endeavored to curry favor with the Moscow paragons of virtue.

These proceedings had begun very early. Already in 1934, when Hitler had hardly begun and had not yet committed any heinous crimes other than putting three million unemployed back to work, and had at his disposal only a sort of

ceremonial army, France had felt a ravenous hunger for fraternization with the Russians.

There had been nothing of romanticism in these first moves. M. Doumergue was attracted neither by the vodka nor the ballet. All that counted for Pains was setting in motion the mechanism for a vast encirclement of the Third Reich and getting the support of the new Soviet Army. The latter, in 1933, had an available 800,000 men and had been reinforced by another 400,000 soldiers the same year. That was 13 times the size of the Reichswehr of the Treaty of Versailles.

The Soviet air force could also fly for Paris.

„At that time,” wrote the French press, „the air potential of the Russians was considerable and that of the Germans zero.”

The military budget of the Soviets had been more than doubled: 6.5 billion rubles in 1933; 14.8 billion, in 1934; almost double that of France (8 billion francs).

„Diplomacy,” coldly declared the old French ambassador, Jules Cambon, „is above all a question of geography. There are eternal laws. If France wants to fight against a great Germany, an alliance with the East is indispensable.”

If Cambon had been responsible for the orientation of his government, this diplomat – he affirmed it straightforwardly – would have sought a Soviet alliance immediately.

„If I were in power, I should undertake every sort of rapprochement with Russia. In order to hold out against Germany, France needs Russia, or she will not hold out.”

Cambon’s conclusion was radical:

„Only one thing is important - we must succeed in containing the invading Pan-Germanism; nothing else counts.”

In a newspaper as „reactionary” as *L’Echo de Paris*, one could even read: „It would be folly at the present time not to be on good terms with the USSR.”

M. Edouard Herriot, a negotiator of the hearty type and pudgy as the Bibendum of Michelin tires, was sent to the Kremlin to do the initial bowing and scraping.

He was a veteran politician. He had been prime minister. France spared no

expense. The man was heavy, rather ordinary, in trousers that were never pressed. But in Moscow, elegance didn't set the fashion for either men or women. Herriot, dressed like a muzhik, would not be out of place among the others. A diplomat in a cutaway would have seemed like an intruder in Moscow. With Herriot, one could be assured, the danger of shocking anyone with his clothes was nil.

Moscow in those days was already gloomy. The people, dead tired, spent an eternity in endless lines to obtain a few coupons good for rye bread or rutabagas. No taxis in the streets, or young couples in love either. But Communist speeches without end coming out of loudspeakers.

The six deputies and senators who were accompanying Herriot had got the words, „you are my treasure,“ translated for themselves in advance-words they surely counted on whispering into the ears of ballerinas who would be dazzled at being addressed by French Adonises. However, our noble graybeards were very disappointed to find that the „Soviet treasures“ were prudes and refused their advances.

„What a quaint country you have,“ a young „people's commissar“ said to them. „With you, it is not youth that is enterprising, but old age!“

The rough janissaries of the Kremlin were more approachable. Stalin, to be sure, would not put in an appearance. Ponderous and prudent dignitaries took his place. They didn't waste time on futilities. Negotiations, to them, meant alliance, not beribboned circumlocutions in the Parisian fashion.

„We cannot imagine a rapprochement with you without a new political and military pact,“ bluntly declared the Soviet minister of foreign affairs, Maksim Maksimovich Vallakt, alias Litvinov, an important Jew and hence a devoted ally, one could well believe.

Another French star of the Left had been sent to the rescue. It was the extremist Pierre Cot, then air minister.

His military counterpart in Moscow had been the best Soviet strategist, Marshal Tukhachevsky. The latter had served as a young officer under the last czar. He had spent some months in a military prison at Ingolstadt in Germany in the company of a tall, spindly-legged beanpole of a French officer who would later have something of a reputation: his name was de Gaulle. During that detention, the Russian had managed to learn from him a certain amount about the French army.

Tukhachevsky immediately proved to be just as intransigent as Litvinov. „What we want,“ he said to Cot, „is a more serious and infinitely closer military pact than

the military alliance France formerly had with czarist Russia”.

The Frenchman nodded his head. Like the technicians who had accompanied him, he was impressed, because he had seen.

On his return to Paris, he explained to the director general of the Air Ministry, „We have seen an aircraft industry and heavy industry infinitely more developed than we expected.” They could serve against Hitler, so it was good to have them on your side! Cot, despite the draconian conditions of the Soviets, had come away decidedly optimistic.

The only sure ally the French government still had in Central Europe, Czechoslovakia, had provided an example: on July 2, 1934, she officially recognized the Soviet state.

France would do much better still: she was going to make every effort to have the USSR admitted into the League of Nations, which had always rejected her – and which Lenin moreover had called „an enterprise of brigands.”



Pierre Laval was a French politician, left-leaning socialist and nationalist who twice participated in the Vichy government after the collapse of the Third Republic after the failure of its aggressive war against National Socialist Germany. Though Laval accepted his position reluctantly and considered his ability to keep the remnant of France out of war with the Allies as key policy achievement, he became a focus of hatred by Jewish and Communist activists, who summarily executed him in 1945 during the Allied occupation.

CHAPTER 25

FRANCE PLAYS WITH FIRE

During 1935, the Swiss delegate to the League of Nations, Giuseppe Motta, tried in vain to lead a last-ditch fight against the Bolsheviks, whom France presented for admission into that august body. He argued, „Does a regime with a policy of expansionist and militant Communism fulfill the necessary requirements for admission amongst us? I don't think so. Because in every sphere – religious, moral, social, political, economic – Communism is the most radical negation of all the ideas which make up our substance and by which we live. The League of Nations is embarking on a hazardous undertaking when she seeks to join fire and water.”

The French delegates, whether or not they liked water, did not fear to play with fire, even Soviet fire. Kindness toward the Soviet Union could be diplomatically and militarily very rewarding. Minister Barthou got up on his thin legs and mounted the platform. „Repulse Russia?” he exclaimed. „To where? Against Europe? I rest my case.”

The future ally, Moscow, as represented by the Jew Maxim Litvinov (*ne Wallach*), was absolutely enchanted:

„I shall remember with gratitude,” he said to his new colleagues, „the initiative taken by the French government as well as the sincere efforts made by the French delegation, and by their Minister of Foreign Affairs M. Barthou, personally.” (Speech made by Soviet Commissar for Foreign Relations Maxim Litvinov at the League of Nations on Sept 18, 1934). Barthou, so warmly felicitated by the Soviets, would not long savor the compliment. Three weeks later a Croatian terrorist would assassinate him, and on French soil at that His Belgrade visit to the worst enemies of the Croats, the Yugoslavs (styled by him „the valiant Czechs” [I]), had thus come to a rather abrupt denouement in the form of a bullet.

Did Barthou's efforts at rapprochement then come to naught?

By no means. At Paris as at Moscow, there was a desire to come together. Barthou was hardly buried – and quickly forgotten – before negotiations were under way again, first at Paris, then at Moscow again. They would rapidly result in a draft agreement providing (Article II) that „in the event of an unprovoked aggression” – the criteria of which were not stipulated – „the USSR and France would reciprocally lend immediate aid and assistance.”

The French minister Pierre Laval, who had succeeded the deceased Barthou at the Quai d'Oisay, was alarmed upon reading that terribly compromising commitment. He remarked: „The Soviets want a treaty to wage war.“ (Alfred Mallet, *Pierre Laval*, vol. I, p. 85).

It was quite obvious. What else had they done for the past 70 years, or would do afterward from Poland and Finland of 1939 right up to the abortive seizure of faraway Afghanistan in 1982? Russian imperialism may have changed flags in 1917, but it did not change its nature in the slightest.

Pierre Laval was a man of peace. He had wished, as the Soviet ambassador Potemkin wrote, „to give the future pact a purely formal character.“ (Potemkin, *Histoire de la Diplomatie*, Vol. III, p. 350).

Because of Laval's hesitancy, the affair very nearly went amiss. But his trip to the Mecca of Moscow in the footsteps of Herriot and Cot was already set and could no longer be canceled. Laval, a shrewd politician, still wished to believe that when it came right down to it, his well-honed craftiness might bamboozle Stalin a bit.

„What is diplomacy?“ he was wont to say. „You offer some things, and they offer you others. And you wind up by coming to an agreement. It's no more difficult than that.“

It would, however, be more difficult „than that.“

To be sure, Laval would be feted by the Russians. Litvinov would give a sensational reception in his honor in the manner of the old regime, with Oumansky, Potemkin and Sokolin prancing about like chamberlains of the czar.

Stalin himself invited Laval to the Kremlin, not to the immense imperial salons but to a cozy cellar where vodka, smoked fish and caviar made equals of Red marshals and petty bourgeois Frenchmen.

Once again Tukhachevsky was there, his manner grave, his blue eyes mysterious. Laval, as relaxed as after a ministerial crisis in Paris, explained good-humoredly that Molotov resembled his moon-faced colleague Loucheur, a French Cabinet minister. They even talked of livestock, a subject in which Laval excelled. He had given Stalin some tips on how to get more calves from his cows. Stalin, easygoing, had listened to the self-satisfied Laval. An hour of small talk about the cows of Chateldon was of small matter to the Bolsheviks. Laval had just signed the pact.

And, above all, a protocol which provided for the accord to apply immediately

in the event of a foreign war, with or without the recommendation of the League of Nations.

The first paragraph of this protocol was particularly compromising: „It is understood that each of the contracting parties shall under the terms of Article 16 of the pact lend assistance to the other immediately in immediate conformity with the recommendations of the Council of the League of Nations as soon as such shall have been pronounced. It is equally understood that the two contracting parties shall act with all the speed demanded by the circumstances and that if, notwithstanding, the council for any reason whatever does not express any recommendation or does not reach a unanimous decision, the obligation to assist will no less apply.“

Thus, if „for any reason whatsoever,” the League of Nations delayed, France would be required to act „with all the speed demanded by the circumstances.”

Act against whom?

It could only be the Germans, the only ones who would be likely one day to have a bone to pick with the Soviets.

„The redaction of paragraph 4,” writes Benoist-Méchin, „leaves no room for doubt: as it is neither Lithuania nor Poland that will attack the USSR, the pact is manifestly directed against Germany.” (Op. cit., p. 974).

„This pact,” French historian Andre Brissaud likewise admits, „is manifestly directed against Germany.” (Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*, p. 244).

The French and the Germans had a common border. In the event of a fight in the East, French soldiers would immediately proceed to the shooting range. The other guarantor, Russia, would nm no similar risk, since the USSR had no border with the Reich.

To go to the aid of the French by attacking the Germans, it would be necessary to pass across Polish and Lithuanian territory: and these two countries would be radically opposed to that. They knew if Soviet troops entered their lands, they would never leave. That was the reason why Poland and Romania had refused to concede to Barthou any right of passage whatsoever for the Bolsheviks and had very nearly broken with the French when the latter had insisted.

In the event, then, that the bilateral agreement had to be kept, the Red Army would not be running any risk at all of coming up against the Wehrmacht, separated from them as it was by some 500 kilometers that the Germany army would first have to cross. Poland would no doubt be devoured *en mute*. After that, they would see. If

worse came to worst, they would share.

„The partitioning of Poland,” it had often been said in both Moscow and Berlin, „is part of a long historical tradition.”

Stalin had killed two birds with one stone, because the Czechs – the only allies that France had left in Central Europe – had also signed a treaty of similar import with him on May 16, 1935. Stalin must have snickered in his mustache there in the cellar of the Kremlin, where Laval had talked with such eloquence of his wonder-working cows and their legions of calves.

In signing this leonine convention, Laval had surely not overlooked the danger of German resentment.

He shared, like almost all the French, the peevish anti-Germanism that was older than the hills. He had the same desire as other Frenchmen to oppose any recovery by the Reich. But the taste he had for the intrigue itself often outweighed his passion. He was conciliatory by nature. His great political skill lay essentially in horse trading, where artful offers and refusals counterbalanced each other.

In his heart, he did not want either a war against the Germans or a military conflict with anyone. People, like his model cattle, needed to graze in peace if they were to grow fat.

The agreement with the Soviets – which he hadn't conceived of himself, but which he had inherited from his predecessor, Barthou – could give the French back a pleasant sense of security. In Paris, it was possible to think that Hitler, thanks to the threat lying to the East, would be tightly confined within his borders and would have to keep to his own kennel.



Marshal Petain and Pierre Laval, vice chairman of the Cabinet from July to December 1940, then head of government starting in April of 1942. Petain had advocated that France avoid a war with Germany for which its military was unprepared, and had advocated an armistice before the German invasion. Once war began, Laval had been an advocate for French victory until the complete destruction of the French military. The two led the Vichy government from 1940 to 1945.

Laval counted on his talents as a smooth negotiator to intimidate the Hitlerian mastiff before it intended to bite him.

But there was nothing of the horse trader about Hitler. A clever sales pitch would not suffice to soften him or make him alter his opinion. The prospect of an attack did not frighten him, as would soon be seen.

Sooner or later someone would have to pay for the damage wrought in Moscow.

After signing his pact in Moscow and before returning to Paris, Laval, trusting to his gift of gab and to his feats of prestidigitation, stopped off in Poland. That stay, he was thinking, would allow him to exercise his talents as a capable bargainer. For Marshal Pilsudski was being buried at Warsaw at the time, and Goering was coining there to represent the Führer of the Reich. With a bit of finesse, Laval would put the mighty German in his hip pocket.

The meeting took place at the Europajsky Hotel, where Laval had dined at one table and Goering at another. Directly thereafter they met again in a salon.

The dialogue was instructive.

Goering: „Let's agree, the two of us between ourselves. France and Germany, the two together, are mistress of the world. But if you continue with your alliances in the East, we shall not be able to do anything with you, and Europe will go to war.“

Rather than say yes or no, Laval preferred to try to bamboozle his corpulent companion. He declared himself quite ready for a rapprochement with Germany, but only if Hitler embraced the various allies in the East at the same time as the French. Any arrangement, as far as he was concerned, would be on the basis of such relations:

„It is strictly on the condition that the same assurances of peace that you make to France be extended to our allies.“

Goering put an end to these offers with a few dry words: „Always your same ideas! In that case, nothing can be done.“

Laval would go back to Paris very satisfied all the same.

But for very different reasons.

Being a politician, his first thought on any occasion was of his electoral mandate. At Moscow, in payment for his signature, Laval had obtained from Stalin the key that would open the door to a parliamentary treasure: the neutrality, and even the support, of the French Communists.

Stalin, whom his brother Communists in the world served merely as pawns, had overwhelmed Laval by promising him he would give orders to Paris for the French comrades' vote in favor of the military budget, which was the very foundation of the government to which Laval belonged.

Laval's worst enemies in his constituency of Aubervilliers were the Communists. If Stalin neutralized them, Laval's reelection would be assured. That promise of Stalin's, of great importance to Laval, was worth increasing the risks of 40 million Frenchmen by throwing them into the jaws of the Soviets.

While up to that time the Communists in France had fought with the utmost violence against all „capitalist“ and „reactionary“ rearmament, now, on orders from Moscow, they were going to vote for the so-called military budget that had been accursed, abhorred and abominated by them the day before.

The final declaration obtained from the Soviets by Laval was drafted in words

as plain as the frost of the Russian steppes: „Stalin fully approves the French policy of national defense for the maintenance of her armed forces at the level required for her security.”

„If I understand you well, your excellency, commissar of the people,” Laval emphasized when countersigning the communique, „this is a recommendation by Stalin to the French Communists.” (Tabouis, *op. cit.*, p.249).

„Just like that,” a colleague of Laval’s exclaimed, „his constituency of Aubervilliers will vote for the war budgets. That’s marvelous!” (Ibid.)

It was not just a matter of a French war budget Far more, it was a matter of what was in the sole interest of the USSR, the one and only fatherland of the Communists of all countries.

Against this purely local and provisional adherence of a handful of Communist deputies and their constituencies, Laval’s France was committed, in the event of an international conflict, to giving immediate assistance to a partner of no use to herself.

This joining together with the Soviets would inevitably draw down on France the lightning of her neighbor, Germany, whom any support for Moscow, Germany’s worst enemy, could not fail to exasperate.

Goering had reported his blunt dismissal of Laval at Warsaw to Hitler. Germany’s reaction was inevitably going to be swift and very sharp. France could not help but feel it coming. The response to Monsieur Laval, the expert horse trader, would not be slow to arrive.



Here, Hitler meets with children from the liberated Saar region at his holiday residence Haus Wachenfeld at Obersalzberg near Berchtesgaden, Hitler was a powerful advocate for German families.

CHAPTER 26

A TALE OF TWO PACTS

Hitler was never hurried at a time of great decisions. Generally, he left for his refuge at Berchtesgaden, paced the floor of his drawing room for hours, gazed out the window at the high white peaks where, legend had it, the phantom of a crusader emperor had once upon a time appeared.

He sat on his sunny terrace and dreamed. When his decision had matured, he would climb into his airplane and resume his place among the living in Berlin. Only then did he decide, give orders and charge ahead.

The most disturbing issue concerning the pact signed by Moscow and France was the seemingly one-sided commitment made by France, in the attached protocol, to intervene militarily on the side of the Soviets „even if the Council of the League of Nations did not issue any recommendation or failed to come to a unanimous decision?

On the one hand, the terms made France wholly committed to backing the Bolsheviks should the Soviet government find itself embroiled in any military contest. On the other, the USSR reserved the right to make her *own* determination as to just who was the „aggressor“ nation before sending its military forces to support France in any future fight That was the only valid interpretation the Wilhelmstrasse could put on the pending Franco-Soviet pact.

„At present,“ French historian Benoist-Méchin is prompted to remark, „the case of a war is envisaged in which, beyond the compass of circumstances specified in the Treaty of Locarno, France would have not just the *right* but the *duty* to attack Germany, in the case of Germany being at grips with the USSR“ – a risk obviously intolerable for any German government (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 276).

After a week of meditation, on May 21, 1935, Hitler mounted the rostrum of the Reichstag.

His tone was grave, but it was apparent from the beginning that he did not intend to do anything drastic. He did not mean to end abruptly his policy of peace in the West Time might – one never knew – put an end to the lack of understanding between France and Germany.

Besides, even if the Laval-Stalin pact had been signed in Moscow, it had not yet

been ratified in Paris. It had still to be submitted to a vote by the French parliament. It could always be rejected there.

Hitler was fundamentally opposed to a war with France. In his view, such a war, anew edition of 1914-1918, would be not just an aberration but suicide – the collective suicide of Europe.

He resolved to contain himself for as long as it was possible to do so.

Another reason to be patient Hitler was far from being ready militarily. The new Wehrmacht was still in its infancy, so to speak. To put together 36 divisions, provide them with cadres, with materiel, and with modern training facilities, would take several years.

„Ten years!“ arrogantly said the French general staff.

Hitler therefore preferred for the moment to launch another appeal for peace – a diplomatic appeal – but contained within was also his issuing of a dire warning.

The desire for peace, to start with: „Germany,“ Hitler announced, „has accepted and by a solemn declaration to France has guaranteed the borders as they exist following the plebiscite of the Saar. ... We have done that, just as we definitely renounce all claim to Alsace-Lorraine, a region for which we have fought two great wars in the past. We are convinced that we have thereby not only rendered a service to our people, but also to the people of that border region. We wish, on our part, to do whatever is in our power to reach a true peace and a real friendship with the French people.“

Next the rejection of any pact, such as that of the French, with Communism;

„National Socialism cannot call on the German people to fight for the preservation of a system which, in our own country at least, has proven itself to be our bitterest enemy. A commitment to peace, yes. As for assistance on the part of the Communists in the event of war, we do not wish it, and, for our part, we are not in a position to grant it.“

And finally, the warning:

„The Franco-Russian military alliance has beyond any doubt introduced an element of insecurity.... The German government would not wish to let the slightest doubt be raised as to its opinion, to wit, that it deems such military alliances incompatible with the spirit and the letter of the League of Nations Treaty.“ (Quotation from Hitler's speech to the Reichstag on May 21, 1935).

Hitler would renew that warning officially in a „memorandum“ he would send to the French government four days later, on May 25, 1935.

„Any intervention by France made in pursuance of the Franco-Soviet Pact would be contrary to Article 16 of the League of Nations Treaty and would signify a violation of the Locarno Pact“.

Hitler was not the only one to denounce the violation of the (1925] Locarno Pact England herself had been anxious to let it be known that she shared Germany's opinion. Even before M. Laval had put his signature on the pact in Moscow, the British foreign secretary, Sir John Simon, had taken care to point out its incompatibility.

He had immediately sent the following telegram to his ambassador, Clarke, in Paris:

„Make known in no uncertain terms that England is disturbed to see France conclude a treaty which could eventually lead to participation in a war against Germany under conditions that are incompatible with paragraph II of the Locarno Pact“ (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cil.*, p. 278).

It was thus not a matter of a unilateral interpretation of the Franco- Russian Pact on the part of Hitler. No, the statesman principally responsible for Great Britain's foreign policy was also of the same opinion.

Even a detractor of Hitler such as the historian Fest could not help admitting that the German chancellor was right: „Hitler's argument was not totally without foundation.“ (Fest, *op. tit*, vol. n, p. 146). Translated into plain English, that admission means the argument was well founded.

Even the important Jewish journalist, Sauerwein, would be heard to say in Paris: „This pact is absurd, since it obliges us French to go to the aid of the Russians if they are attacked. Now, just think of that. What an absurdity!“ (Tabouis, *op. cit.*, p. 293).

Simon the Englishman, Fest the German and Sauerwein, the French Jew, were unanimously in agreement with Hitler's interpretation of the terms and conditions contained in the Franco-Soviet treaty. What an extraordinary trinity.

Later the Allies would drown their disagreement on the pact in interminable tangled explanations. But the Foreign Office document is there: Even before Hitler had made a move to proclaim the incompatibility of the Franco-Soviet agreement with the Locarno Pact, the British government had done so, and so signified by wire

to the French government.

It remained to be seen what was going to take place in Paris. Parliamentary government has always meant dilatoriness, amendments, contradictions, tergiversation, sabotage and fracas. Democratic ceremonies take time. In February 1936 – hence nine months after its initial signing by Communist functionaries in Moscow – the Franco-Soviet treaty was still awaiting final ratification by that august body of French legislators – the Chamber of Deputies. Hitler endeavored to profit by this respite by launching a final appeal, a month before the vote, to Monsieur Flandin, who was head at that moment of the French government.

„At the beginning of 1936,” Benoist-Méchin tells us, „the Reich tries a new diplomatic maneuver. It informs France through the agency of its *charge d'affaires* in Paris that it is always ready to sign a non-aggression pact with her, but will consider the ratification of the Soviet pact by the French parliament „as an unfriendly act toward Germany and incompatible with the obligations of the Locarno Pact” (*Op. cit.*, pp. 278f).

Immediate reply of the French premier: „The question has already been settled by the governments involved, and there is no reason to refer to it again. Moreover, France considers herself henceforth committed *vis-a-vis* the USSR.” (*Ibid.*)

„From now on,” Benoist-Méchin laconically concludes, „we are on a dangerous downhill slope.”

For all that, nothing was yet in effect. On Feb. 12, 1936, discussion of the pact begins at the Palais Bourbon and rapidly becomes very lively, because a number of deputies have calculated the dangers of the accord.

The French government, which in response to Hitler had affirmed that the Soviet Pact was not strictly a military alliance, gives herself the lie by receiving Gen. Tukhachevsky in Paris while the debates are still going on. He discusses collaboration with Gen. Gamelin, the head of the French army, at great length. The collusion between these two superior officers and privileged negotiators is public and flagrant.



The Munich Conference of 1938 was a meeting between the governments of Britain, France, and Italy, supervised by Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union, in which the three powers made a pact to defend Austria in case of German invasion. Italy would later withdraw from the pact in favor of Germany. Shown from left to right: Pierre Laval, Josef Stalin, Pierre Franclin (French premier) and Ramsey MacDonald (English prime minister).

For a week the debate rages in the French parliament. Then, on February 19, 1936, a particularly prominent deputy, M. Taittinger, the mayor of Paris, mounts to the platform and, to a chorus of boos from the extreme left, hurls a prophetic warning at the Assembly: „The ratification of this agreement will be considered by Germany to be a threat and will give her cause to remilitarize the left bank of the Rhine.”

Taittinger and his colleagues of the right would thereafter fight a lost cause: the Franco-Soviet Pact would be carried on February 27, 1936 despite the opposition of 164 deputies.

In the meantime a scandalous incident had occurred. Hitler decided to make one last personal appeal to the French people on February 21, thus six days before the treaty was put to a vote in the French parliament.

However, immediately before its publication in France, Hitler's appeal had been made away with by the French government and kept secret the German leader's message had been addressed in the form of an interview granted to one of the best-known political writers of France, M. Bertrand de Jouvenel, an academician of great renown and a member of a family of diplomats of largely Jewish blood.

„Hitler thinks that his interview coming at this precise moment might tilt the balance in favor of non-ratification of the pact” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 284).

The text, according to an agreement with the press, was to be published with a fanfare on the morning of the 22nd of February. But, nothing appeared in the French newspapers on that day nor on the days following. What had gone wrong? The minister of Foreign Affairs had simply intercepted the interview transcript before its publication. He had been sitting on it, holding it, he would later admit, „for examination.”

„The French deputies [did] not know of the German chancellor’s appeal in time,” Benoist-Méchin writes, „because publication of the interview [was] delayed for seven days, and the public [was] not informed of it until it [was] too late.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 279).

We all know that in a democracy, freedom of the press is sacred, and censorship no longer exists. Hitler would experience it in Paris: a message to the French people from the German head of government, yet he would be censored for seven whole days.

Hitler’s appeal to the French was important nonetheless. Had his words enlightened only another 95 deputies, that would have been enough for rejection of the pro-Soviet pact Hence the brazen-faced suppression of its publication.

What did Hitler say?

„Today, I wish to prove to my people that the notion of an eternal enmity between France and Germany is absurd, that we are by no means hereditary enemies. The German people understand it. They have followed me in an infinitely more difficult reconciliation, the reconciliation of Germany and Poland... Now I want to make a success of the same *detente* with France. It is not good for people to spend the ir psychological forces on fruitless hatreds.”

M. Bertrand de Jouvenel had interrupted: „In *Mein Kampf* you greatly maligned France!”

Hitler had then put his hand almost affectionately on the arm of the French writer „I was in prison when I wrote that book. French troops were occupying the Ruhr. It was a time of the greatest tension between our two countries. Yes, we were enemies. And I was with my country, as is fitting, against yours. As I have been with my country against yours during 4.5 years in the trenches... But today there is no longer any reason for conflict Do you want me to make corrections in my book as a writer who prepares a new edition of his books? But I am not a writer – I am a political man. My rectification? I provide it every day in my foreign policy directed toward friendship with France. If I succeed in a Franco- German rapprochement, as I wish, that will be a rectification worthy of me. I shall write my rectification in the

great book of history.”

Jouvenel had resumed his questioning: „Isn't the Franco-Soviet Pact going to compromise the Franco-German rapprochement you desire?”

Hitler had remained silent for a moment. That question went to the heart of the problem. At Paris, the vote was only seven days away. Deliberately he enunciated his answer: „In cold fact, this more than deplorable pact would naturally create a new situation.

„Are you really aware of what you are doing? You are getting yourselves involved in the diplomatic game of a power that seeks only to create a disorder among the great European nations from which she alone will benefit. You must not lose sight of the fact that Soviet Russia is a political body having both gigantic armaments and an explosive revolutionary idea at its disposal. As a German, it is definitely my duty to take such a situation into account. Bolshevism has no chance of succeeding with us. But there are other great nations who are less on guard against the Bolshevik virus than we are.

„You would do well,” Hitler continued, „to give serious thought to my offers of an *entente*. No German leader has ever made such overtures to you before. Nor such repeated overtures. And from whom do those offers come? From a pacifist charlatan who has made a specialty of international relations? No, from the greatest nationalist Germany has ever had leading her. I bring you something that no one else could ever bring you: an *entente* that will be approved by 90 percent of the German nation, the 90 percent who follow me!”

Speaking not to the French author, but to all of France, he said: „I beg you to note this well, that there are decisive moments in the life of a people. Today France can, if she wishes, put an end forever to that ‘German peril’ that your children learn to fear from generation to generation. You can lift the dread mortgage that weighs on the history of France. This opportunity is given to you. If you make no move to seize it, think of your responsibility to your children. You have before you a Germany whose people, nine-tenths of them, have complete trust in their leader, and that leader tells you: ‘Let us be friends!’” (These quotations from Hitler's message were published in *Paris Midi* on Feb. 28, 1936).

Fifty years later, some Frenchmen will retort that Hitler, by that appeal, meant to lead them astray, the more easily to strangle them later.

Like them, historian Benoist-Méchin has asked himself: „Was Hitler sincere in formulating those proposals? There is no serious reason to doubt it” (*Op. cil*, p. 283).

Hitler's attitude in this respect faithfully matched a whole series of initiatives aimed in effect at promoting this rapprochement Long before, the chancellor of the Reich had sent von Ribbentrop to Paris for the purpose of inviting M. Daladier to come and see him. In 1935, he had received in Berlin with special honors a delegation of French war blind led by Deputy Scapini, who was also blind. He arranged a pilgrimage of German veterans to Douamont for the purpose of fraternizing with their former French adversaries.

This sensational interview, without precedent in international relations, Hitler had granted to M. Bertrand de Jouvenel so that it might be transmitted *immediately* to the French public at large. And it was this text, the repercussions of which might have been considerable, that shortsighted politicians within the Paris government had kept under wraps during the entire week of the parliamentary debates. But even that maneuver, though of rare boorishness, was not enough for them.

On Feb. 28, 1936, when the vote had been taken, they would make improper use of Hitler's appeal by then turning the article over for publication to an unimportant newspaper, *Paris Midi*, and letting it be believed that the German leader had given the interview *after* the vote and, hence, that he had ratified it in some manner or other.

Benoist-Méchin, analyzing the maneuver, adds: „When readers of the chancellor's interview see the *Paris Midi* issue of Feb. 28, they cannot help feeling momentarily surprised. Coming *after* the ratification of the pact, Hitler's proposals have a totally different ring to them. You begin to wonder if it isn't the signing of the pact that has led Hitler to its composition and spurred him to formulate his ever-so-friendly offers. But then, how right it was to ratify the treaty, since it gives France both a guarantee from Moscow and overtures from Berlin! No doubt the chancellor, resigning himself to the inevitable, found it the better part of wisdom to seek reconciliation with France." (*Op. cit.*, III, pp. 283 f).

That machination, ascribable to the lowest kind of politics and carried out at the expense of a foreign chief of state – the most important one in Western Europe – surpassed every other dirty trick Europe had known since Versailles. It was like a direct slap in the face for Hitler.

That France was definitely embracing the Soviets had already provoked a strong reaction in Hitler. But this low blow was the last straw. Hitler exploded. He had the French ambassador, M. François-Poncet, summoned to his office and gave him a severe dressing-down:

I shall respond as one is wont to respond to a moral swindle because I have been betrayed and mocked. My interview with M. de Jouvenel was in no

way an approval of your pact, but a final warning against its ratification. I received Jouvenel eight days ago. He knew very well what it was about. But at Paris, and no doubt in your embassy as well, publication of the article was delayed in order to deceive the French about my true intentions. But just take the time to read what I said, and you will clearly see that my proposals were not in the slightest an approval of the Franco-Soviet pact! A France that has become the ally of the Kremlin is no longer the France I addressed a week ago. You will receive my reply before long.

Ambassador François-Poncet, ordinarily rather a blusterer, left, totally abashed.

He knew the Führer. And he had no doubt that Hitler was not just airing an idle threat.

For just nine days later, Hitler was going to set his machine in motion. On March 7, 1936, in response to the voting of the Franco-Soviet Pact and the press swindle that followed it, he was going to break down the doors of the Rhineland with one mighty kick.



Hitler was a proponent of public works projects that glorified the German nation and provided jobs for the German people. Here, he discusses the redevelopment of downtown Berlin and the creation of a downtown area similar to the National Mall in Washington, DC, which would glorify the capital of Germany as the capital of a new German Empire of Europe.

CHAPTER 27

AUTHORITY AND POWER: WHAT IT MEANT TO DE FÜHRER

Being a leader does not mean being a man who gives orders impulsively, who takes everything upon himself, allowing no initiative to anyone else; a man before whom his coworkers tremble, fearing to stray so much as a hair from their master's every whim.

Above all, being a leader does not imply you are going to do everything yourself, to be a workaholic intent on managing the whole shebang, knocking yourself out 16 hours a day plowing through paperwork and summoning coworkers who have become mere machines for carrying out orders.

The true leader is the man who delegates a maximum of technical responsibility to his immediate fellow workers in order, before everything else, to have time to think, to dream if need be, to let an idea mature so that at the proper moment it can have the maximum possible impact.

And that is what Adolf Hitler, the Führer, was going to be, above all else. He would never be finicky. He would never busy himself with details. He would content himself with the development of vaster and loftier ideas.

Once these had taken form, the higher civil servants would have a free hand, whether it was Goebbels putting together an enormous propaganda machine, or Röhm organizing the party's shock troops, or Schacht – an adversary, no less – stalling up Germany's economy once again, or Goering carrying out the „four-year plan.“.

That was the *Führerprinzip*, the Leadership Principle.

The colleague charged with a mission was absolute master in his sphere of action. Hitler set him on course and spurred him on, but the man in charge had a free hand.

A Baldur von Schirach would thus be able to get on with his rallying of hundreds of thousands of youngsters into the *Hitlerjugend* without seeing Hitler other than for an hour or two from time to time.

They were all working and enjoying the same autonomy. Each person could develop his potentiality to the maximum.

Hitler studied his great plans through and through, and he intended to realize them without being shackled. He did not want people to distract him with trifles. He was the thinker and the coordinator. The work and the responsibility of realization were given to others.

The only penalty was for failure.

And in that event you would disappear.

Actually, few would disappear. Over the years, anyone who did not go astray was secure in his job to the end. He could look ahead. For as long as he worked efficiently, the future was his.

It was thus with everything Hitler did: absolute, unquestioned authority supported by free fellow workers who were completely empowered within a prescribed area to carry out National Socialist ideas, to inscribe them in deeds as it were. Whether they remained in their jobs or rose higher depended solely on the quality of their creativity.

Everyone gave himself up completely to his job, to his assignment, which did not encroach on that of others and on which in turn no other encroached. For five years, for 10 years he could go on developing.

The leader, the Führer, was in command, at the top of the entire team. He propelled it, but everyone in authority was master of his own sector; he used imagination; he made decisions; he got things done.

The leader approved or disapproved, promoted or fired, on the basis of success or failure, but only after having given everyone the means and the time to produce. You were judged on the evidence, on the results, but you could achieve the results on your own, without niggling supervision, without ill-considered orders or counter orders.

Being a leader is directing a concert. The orchestra conductor is not the drummer, nor does he play the flute. Thus freed of the duty of playing all the instruments himself, Hitler could think, which in politics, as in everything else, is fundamental.

That leader is lost who no longer has the time to gather in his ideas, to weigh them, or even to wait for them to appear.

Hitler was always able to withdraw from everything when he had to concentrate or to unwind, to give himself, his inner nature, the time and sunshine needed to ripen his ideas.

He might pass eight days or fifteen days apart from the world in his Tyrolean refuge of Berchtesgaden, for a long time just a simple cottage, where only the crystalline snow-clad peaks stood guard against the lucent sky. He appeared to be doing nothing: he touched neither paper nor pen. But then was the time of essential creation. His mind, detached from everything, was open to everything. All of Hitler's great decisions were born in this way, in meditation and solitude.

Had he been buried from dawn to dusk in wearisome paperwork, he would never have wrought any great achievements. But freed from the incidental, he was the man of the essential.

Hitler's great powers would be nourished in that apparent dilettantism. Thanks to it, he would remain free of any tether. His every idea would be born in him at the moment of its coming to full flower. After he had taken the time to see things clearly, he would make a lightning decision. Then he would charge like a bull that nothing any longer frightened.

Creating a great political movement with which to conquer a nation, then for years holding the fate of the world in his hands: all that, starting from next to nothing – a jacket, his clodhoppers, and the fifty marks given a demobilized veteran – must have seemed totally beyond achievement.

Yet Hitler did achieve it.

How? In the first place, he possessed, as everyone knows, an eloquence such as Germany had never experienced. That was a tremendous asset He sent crowds into a trance and was thereby an irresistible enchanter.

Moreover, he had within himself an innate sense of authority. He didn't have to work at it He was born to his calling, as others are born to music or have it in their nature to paint or write poetry. On the 29th of September 1921, sweeping aside the envious, the timid souls and the unimaginative, he took charge of his party and was thenceforth its absolute commander the Führer.

The party in those days consisted of only a few thousand members all told. But he would act to win over ten thousand times as many more.

A vast human host was awaiting him out there.

With only rudimentary means at his disposal, he would achieve amazing results, forcing people to pay attention to him.

At each of his meetings the rickety old trucks of his first adherents went up and down the streets creating an enormous uproar. Flags marked with the Hooked Cross

were unfurled and swirled like so many suns. Leaflets rained down upon the passersby. Insofar as he could, Hitler more and more endeavored to stir up the crowds. He organized bands to tramp up and down the streets with all brass instruments blaring.

Who the devil is this Hitler, the passersby, often dumbfounded by this aggressive advertising, would ask themselves, then wind up going to see what was happening in Hitler's meeting, held perhaps in a simple coffeehouse or a grandiose amphitheater. At the end of half an hour, they would be standing on a chair, screaming and cheering.

Before the 30th of January, 1933, 18 million Germans would be climbing onto their seats that way.

A nation is made up of simple people, whether they are bank employees or peasants working in the field.

And the working masses are roughly half of the whole.

Hitler wanted to reconcile the notions of nation and society, and so he had to reach those masses, to enlighten them, reshape them and explain to them that only his formula for cooperation of the classes could bring the people out of the morass of their mediocrity.

The people of Germany in 1921 were a fief of Marxism. The latter had gone, since 1918, from one revolution to another, doing nothing but shedding blood and increasing disorder. In their most moderate form the Marxist parties had done nothing but flounder. They had discredited themselves by accepting the *diktat* of Versailles but still remained aggressive. Sensing the people's decreasing confidence in themselves, they sought to maintain it by means of violence and intransigence.

Hitler, who was now emerging as a rival, however slender his influence might be as yet, was the one man who must at all cost be prevented from getting his message heard.

The middle classes were no problem, no danger there: at the sight of ten or twelve Red bruisers, they would quietly slip away.

But Hitler was another story. He had begun to attract people: and among his few thousand supporters, many (a third) were workers. It was becoming imperative to counter him, whether by jeering, by coarse derision, or by force. He had to be squashed like a flea while he was still no more than a flea.



Hitler was a speaker of profound power, who used the newly developing mediums of radio and film to bring his message of German unification and empowerment to all of the German people. Here, Hitler speaks to the people at a political rally during the rise to power of German National Socialism.

That battle to the death that Marxism declared against Hitler was exactly what Hitler was seeking.

Far from fearing it, he wanted the confrontation, so that the people might be the judge. However weak he might have been, he felt himself to be the stronger. He did not dodge the fight; he provoked it. He patterned his methods precisely after those of his enemies. The latter, as opposed to the middle class, had always sought to impress and attract the public by demonstrations of power.

Hitler would always be right on their heels, swiping the color of their flags, exactly copying the crude appeal of their placards, going with his partisans right through the districts that were most Red, the intangible bastions of which the Marxists were so jealous and so proud.

Hitler's advertising trucks and blaring bands showed up in the places where the Red dictatorship was absolute. It was bravado. But at last people began to realize that Marxism wasn't the only tiring around.

Hitler himself thus had the opportunity to study from up close the combat methods of the socialists and the Communists he meant to eliminate using precisely their own tactics.

„I have learned a great deal from the Marxists,“ he would assert. „I freely admit it. Not from their boring social doctrine and their historical materialism, that tissue of absurdities. But their methods have instructed me. I have taken pains to determine

just how hesitantly these small minds, these shopkeepers and these bureaucrats began. All National Socialism is there within it. See for yourselves. The new means used in political combat were invented in their essentials by the Marxists. I had only to borrow them and bring them into focus to have at our disposal everything we lacked. All I had to do was to pursue logically the attempts in which Social Democracy had failed ten times over. National Socialism is what Marxism could have been if it had broken the absurd and artificial ties that bound it to a democratic order.“

Marxism was stubborn and stuck to a few elementary key ideas which it hammered home incessantly. It struck with the blows of a pile driver. It was tough and at the same time bold. Hitler meant to be tougher and even bolder. In sum, he would defeat Marxism with Marxism.

He would go so far as to enroll many young Hitlerites in the schools for socialist and Communist cadres in order to learn the adversary's arguments and tactics. His men, instead of shunning the Marxist meetings, would turn up at them without a tie and more or less slovenly dressed.

Hitler would combat Marxism as an enemy when he had thoroughly learned its every thought and every method.

Hitler also immediately understood that the fight against Marxism would be impossible unless he had a powerfully structured organization at his disposal.

The „Reds“ were numerically very strong, a hundred times more so than he, but their power was diffused, with little direction or poorly led by incompetent brawlers.

For Hitler, assembling a tight organization was the first order of the day. He abandoned the miserable gloomy premises of Anton Drexler and the other founders who were frightened by his „follies.“ It was not yet the „Brown House,“ but it was big. Work could be done in several offices.

Not a red cent to buy furniture? Hitler made an appeal to his people: bring a chair, a table, some shelves, a filing cabinet from your home. That same afternoon the new premises at No. 38 Corneliusstrasse were all set. Cost to the movement: not one penny. In these suitable quarters, the command would be able to work, to organize and to multiply the centers of action and create cells in large numbers.

There, one inflexible rule would dominate Hitler's decisions: not to create any sections until a true local leader was available for that purpose. Good men led by a dunce or a spineless person grow discouraged and letdown: the section dies, having

done more bad than good. On the other hand, a young leader with the soul of a lion will turn sheep into lions. The organization of the Hitler movement was prudent and realistic. They didn't put up the building until they were sure of the foundation.

Hitler put a lot of time into it. But in a few years he would have the best structured network a European political organization had ever possessed. His victory would be due in good part to his flawless planning. In time the country would be divided into thousands of cells, blocks, streets, districts, towns, regions, provinces. In the Munich central headquarters there was a file card for every last member, and it could be located in a second.

The most modern American management would have done no better.

„Hitler's political talent," Maser, the historian, admits, „is revealed from the very first weeks of his activity in the party, where in a very short time he created a powerful and respected organization."

„Such an enterprise," the author continues, „could not very well be run by Hitler without the assistance of an experienced and well-trained team: „From the beginning of his political career, he endeavored systematically to setup the organization he would need to realize his plans. His party was run in the manner of a Prussian school at the time of the Sergeant-King. Every member of the party was bound to obey like a soldier the orders of his leaders. The National Socialist party, which was organized like an army from 1921 on, knew nothing of putting things to a vote, of discussions, or objections. After 1921, Hitler played the part of the all-powerful dictator of his party."

He would always cling fiercely to this monolithic organization without which his fight would often have come down to a game of skirmishes. Certain sudden threats – when it was necessary to bring to bear the power of this implacably organized authority in all its weight – made it clear that without this structure, in moments difficult to get over or times of great temptation, the movement would have been left to drift.

On no occasion did Hitler ever allow anyone at all to join the party without submitting himself unconditionally to this rigid discipline. No group similarly inclined could be admitted into his organization without agreeing to complete absorption. One leader. One truth. Without a kinklet on either his left or his right.

Even someone like Julius Streicher, who had put together a nationalist movement in Franconia of a considerable size, and who in the beginning had fought passionately against Hitler, completely submitted like a trooper. But a dazzled trooper. One day – on Jan. 22, 1922 – he heard Hitler speak. He was transported.

Benumbed, he explained:

„I saw this man, after a speech of three hours, radiant and dripping with sweat. Someone nearby believed he saw a halo around his head, and I felt an indefinable something. An inner voice ordered me to arise, and I went to the platform to deliver the movement I had created into his hands.“

It was only in this way that Hitler made alliances.

Everyone was free to decide, but the authority was not shared. This total authority would be the ultimate weapon of his victory. There was still another form of protection they still had to be able to turn to: force.

„The idea of fighting is as old as life itself,“ Hitler often repeated.

They would not have to pick this fight.

The German Marxists had always been very intolerant. They had never conceded liberty to anyone but themselves. The *Rote Fahne* of May 30, 1920 wrote in so many words: „The proletariat claims for itself the liberty of assembly. It must be denied to its enemies.“

Anyone who did not think like the Marxists was a heretic.

The world bastion of Marxism, the [former] USSR, has proven it a thousand times. Whether it was a question of the doctrinaire Lenin of 1917 or the brutal Stalin, victor in World War II, anyone who was not in accord with them found himself in the cellars of the Cheka, or perhaps admiring Russian scenery from the top of a gibbet, or eating rats caught at night in the latrines of a frozen camp in the Siberian wilderness.

And Hitler committed the crime not only of not being a Marxist but of being fundamentally anti-Marxist by resorting to the very tactics of Marxism. As a matter of fact, the fury of the Reds didn't trouble him at all. He even lay in wait for them to provide proof that their rule of terror had come to an end and that he was firmly determined to oppose Marxist terrorism with an implacable counterterrorism. It was the only real solution if loyal citizens were to be permitted to live free. To submit to the law of the hoodlums was to give up defending liberty.

You don't extend your hand to enemies like that, as so many simpletons do these days: you use their own methods and put them out of their misery.

Hitler would not have long to wait for an occasion to show the people that he

didn't capitulate to the savage intolerance like the others, but that he faced up to it, even counterattacked, and that he won.

The first confrontation took place on Nov. 5, 1921, only a few days after he had been recognized as the „Führer,“ and four days after the move to the new premises on Corneliusstrasse.

Up to that moment the Marxists still knew very little of Hitler's exceptional gifts, having scarcely bothered his meetings. Once a troublemaker had called Hitler an ape. That wasn't serious. But on Nov. 5, 1921 it was going to be altogether different. The extremists of the left had decided it was necessary to have done with this troublesome beginner. His staff for maintaining order was still weak. Ruining his meeting would be rather a diversion.

It very nearly was just that. At a quarter to eight in the evening Hitler entered the vast hall of the *Hofbräuhaus*. His opponents had occupied the terrain before the bulk of the regular audience had come in. The Communists held all the strategic points.

All in all, Hitler could count on only about fifty supporters to maintain order in that huge community hall. He hastily gathered them all together:

„For the first time you're going to show your fidelity to the movement in a pitched battle. I don't want any of you leaving the hall unless you're dead. I'll personally tear the insignia off any coward. You are to respond instantly if anyone attempts to make trouble. I intend to remain on the platform to the end. Are any of you going to desert me?“

The clash came in almost no time.

Hitler had begun his speech as if the Marxist threat gave him no concern. Then one of the ringleaders jumped up on a chair and called for the attack.

These socialists and Communists had accumulated hundreds of stoneware mugs from the *Hofbräuhaus* ahead of time: these now flew through the air like shells. People were howling and yelling, making an infernal racket. But at that very moment Hitler's fifty bold and determined young men rushed into action.

They weren't very many, to be sure. Only their courage could save them. And their *esprit de corps*; for they went into action in small groups of four or five always helping each other. They spared no one. With slashing blows of their army belts they bloodied the faces of the troublemakers, who fell back, startled. They pitched into them again and drove them bleeding to the exit.

There was a crackling of gunfire. Then flight. At the end of twenty-five minutes there wasn't a single Marxist left in the hall, which was now littered with hundreds of broken beer mugs and spattered with blood.

The throng of people who had not been able to enter surged in and cheered Hitler, while his young defenders who were injured were led away to the hospital.

Resounding proof had just been given that the Marxists were no longer the masters of the public halls, that their terror had been countered with violence equal to their own, and that at last they had found themselves facing an adversary who wouldn't be stopped and whose supporters would die for him if necessary.

Hitler had not sought that confrontation. The Marxists had provoked it. But the two-fold lesson had been exemplary: Marxism no longer owned the streets and public halls.

The matter was not going to be limited to this tough settling of accounts.

Hitler intended that henceforth any such Red attacks would no longer be met by fifty volunteers charging in at the risk of getting themselves all killed, but by a strong and seasoned body of men, disciplined, used to fighting, ready for defense and attack as well if it were necessary to fall on the enemy first.

It is from that day we can date the birth of the famous SA: the „Storm Troopers“: the *Sturmabteilung*.

The leftist parties had no right to complain. They were the ones who had been troublemakers first. And now they were going to have the SA, growing ever stronger, right on their heels without respite.

Every blow would be answered by a blow. And often 10 or 20 blows.

At the outset Goering commanded these protection units in accordance with Hitler's *Führerprinzip* that all posts be filled by leaders who would then be truly responsible.

Goering was the most celebrated German flyer surviving from World War I. His „von Richthofen“ squadron alone had downed 400 enemy planes in combat. Around his neck he wore Germany's most famous decoration: the Order of Merit.

He had heard Hitler speak one day and had belonged to him from that time on. He had a powerful mind and an iron fist. He would be the creator of the SA. Within just a few months he would make it the battering ram of the National Socialists.

Later he was succeeded by the absolute prototype of all tough characters, Ernst Röhm, a hero of the war of 1914-1918. Röhm had had half of his face torn off in the war. His nose was an artificial one that had been put together for him from pieces of flesh from his thighs. In Munich he had a rather important role in the Army as the handler of the secret funds of Army Security, very closely linked to the authorities and often even having an advantage over them.

Hitler and Röhm did not know each other until several months after the future Führer had taken up his party activities. They had become comrades. Röhm would become one of the very few men to use the familiar form of address with the Führer. They would clash one day because they did not at all see eye to eye on the subject of the SA Röhm wanted to make it into an enormous proletarian army after the manner of the Red Army; Hitler, on the contrary, saw it only in the role of a force for maintaining order.

„Boxing and jujitsu,” he said, „are of more use to the SA than training in sharpshooting. Our goal is not the creation of a sham army. Our goal is the conquest of the state. Everything else will follow.”

In Hitler's view, the Reichswehr was to remain Germany's true army, superlatively trained in strategy and tactics, and possessing a century-old tradition. It would be increased in size and above all transformed, when the time was right, by a massive recruitment of young men infused with National Socialism. Hitler was not in a hurry; Röhm was. Hitler had faith in the old army's ideas of service and honor; Röhm did not. In any event, in 1921 it was not an immediate problem. The fighting was carried on solely in the meeting halls and in the street, not at the border.

Röhm, spurred on by Hitler, vigorously and grandly developed and enlarged the SA Eagles and standards designed by Hitler that were worthy of the Roman Empire. Uniforms that each volunteer had to pay for out of his own pocket, often at a considerable personal sacrifice. A striking armband that could be recognized in the street from 100 yards away: „The Hooked Cross on the steel helmet. / Our armband: red, white, black. /Our name: Attack Group Hitler.”

At that time, too, the Hitler salute was inaugurated: the upraised arm of the ancient Germans, outstretched in a gesture of fraternity; it was the greeting, too, of Luther at the Diet of Worms.

As for the party, it had dropped the old designation of DAP to become the NSDAP. Added to it was the rallying cry: *Heil Hitler*. Friends and enemies both knew with whom they were dealing.

The SA would quickly be six thousand strong.

They would know countless battles.

The most notable set-to would be one in the city of Coburg on Oct. 14, 1922 that pitted them against the Marxists, who had up to then believed themselves to be the masters of the city.

Hitler had been invited to „German Day“ of the nationalist parties. These parties consisted for the most part – unlike the NSDAP – of rather timorous petty bourgeois and trades people who set high value on the glass of their store windows. The Marxists had spitefully threatened them with street incidents, so they were fearful to begin with.

Now, here was Hitler arriving at the station. The organizers immediately asked him not to parade his troops through the city in a column, not to wave flags and above all to silence the band. Hitler had not brought along eight hundred strapping fellows of the SA by special train from Munich to have them enter Coburg like frightened rabbits. With the band in the lead – forty-two musicians blowing up a storm – the eight hundred SA stalwarts, led by Hitler, went through the city from one end to the other.

The Marxists were struck breathless. Not one of them dared to make a move or raise a finger during the parade.

In the evening, with the arrival of darkness, they meant to take their revenge. They surrounded the barrack buildings where the SA were lodged and bombarded them with a great number of stones. The SA came storming out, counterattacked, gave them a good licking and put the pack of them to flight.

The following day was the big day of the confrontation. Dawn found the town plastered with posters calling the proletariat to riot.

Hitler had foreseen the move and had sent for reinforcements: another 700 members of the SA. He definitely meant to hold the meeting in the Great Square as planned. His fifteen hundred men, with flags flying and trombones blaring, started through the streets. The appeal of the Reds had met with only relative success. The Marxists demonstrators were only a few hundred in number. At their first catcalls the SA fell upon them, gave them a thrashing, and hurled them out of the Great Square within a matter of minutes. The public cheered.

The final act of this colorful hand-to-hand fighting would take place at the railroad station itself.

There, the Communist railway men declared that they would prevent the SA return train from leaving for Munich. Hitler at once seized the ringleaders and sat

them down, closely watched, in the cars and perched on the locomotive itself.

„Well, now,” he said to the railway men, „you don’t want to run the train? Okay, we’ll run it ourselves. But since we aren’t very familiar with the controls, it might just derail. You’re for equality? Perfect. This way we’ll all go together.”

Manifestly, the idea of committing suicide in Hitler’s company didn’t seem very enchanting to the Marxist leaders. The railway men wisely resumed their regular places. By night, everyone was back at Munich, Hitler, the fifteen hundred SA men and the forty-two musicians. The battle of Coburg would quickly become part of the National Socialist legend. Courage pays. Coburg would be the first city in Germany to give Hitler an absolute electoral majority.

At times the confrontations turned out badly. On Aug. 9, 1921, a Munich separatist, Otto Ballestedt, imagined he would make a speech and be acclaimed for proposals he had introduced beforehand relative to the constitution of federal States of South Germany and the repudiation of all Berlin authority.

To Hitler, the Marxists were not the only enemies of the Reich; the separatists were just as much so.

The said Ballestedt had no more than appeared on the rostrum than Hitler charged onto the platform with two comrades. He sparred with the orator before the entire audience and ousted him to the accompaniment of a din from among the gathering.

„It’s okay, it’s okay,” Hitler calmly declared, halting the row. „We’ve achieved our goal. Ballestedt won’t speak any longer.”

He would not speak any longer, but the police would speak in his stead. They arrested Hitler. He would be incarcerated for 33 days.

Germany went from violence to more violence. Erzberger, who had gotten the Treaty of Versailles signed, a man little praiseworthy, compromised and sullied by speculations („he doesn’t have any clean clothes left,” said Undersecretary of State von Rheinbaben), was killed in a watering place in Baden, at Titisee.

As for Scheidemann, he had acid thrown at him and barely escaped.

The fate of Rathenau, the minister of foreign affairs, is yet more tragic. He was a Jew. On June 24, 1922, right in the middle of Berlin, he was cut down in his own car by machine-gun fire. And to make sure there was no mistake, he was finished off with a grenade thrown at his feet.

Hitler had nothing to do with these crimes. He was in prison in Munich at the time Rathenau was struck down. He vigorously condemned all such attempts.

It would later be known that these murderous attacks had been the work of the „Consul“ organization that had no connection with National Socialism.

But the occasion offered too beautiful an opportunity to leap on Hitler and destroy his movement: on the order of the Reichstag, the NSDAP suddenly found itself banned in Prussia, in Saxony, in Thuringia and in Hamburg. By virtue of the sacrosanct principle of democracy, the protector and guarantor of liberty, you may be sure.

From that day on, a public speech by Hitler would no longer be possible. Not a single one of his headquarters, from the North Sea to Königsberg, would be open either. Was the entire National Socialist organization going to collapse? Hitler was a man of luck: Bavaria, always something of a rebel, bridled and refused to implement the ban.

A large part of the population of Munich was for Hitler. And for the time being Hitler was going to concentrate his activities there.

Bavaria unfortunately was not the Reich.

Moreover, soon there, too, everything possible would be done to oppose the young Führer.

But meanwhile, that powerful province offered him a big springboard, and Hitler climbed upon it. From there he would be able to plunge deep into the waters of destiny.

CHAPTER 28

EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE BEER HALL PUTSCH' FUSILLADE

As an instigator of *coups d'état*, Adolf Hitler was a novice. Was a *coup d'état* even what he really wanted in November of 1923? He had been thinking of it, he said straightforwardly, ever since the day when he got out of the Pasewalk hospital. But he had to have the means for it. On Nov. 8, 1923, he did not have the means. All he wanted that night was to turn Munich – without resorting to violence – into a tremendous instrument of pressure capable of impelling Bavaria to a national march on Berlin, not to break up the state, but to save Germany.

Hitler was little known in Berlin in 1923, though more so perhaps than one might have thought. The sad thing was that on the night following his disaster, more than 600 sympathizers would be loudly demonstrating in the mayor centers of the capital, with cries of *Heil Hitler*.

The army that might have opposed Hitler at Berlin was not very strong. And by chance, the guard battalion on duty that night was made up only of Bavarians. All the same, it was a big bite to swallow. Hitler was deceiving himself politically. Berlin was the main Marxist fief of the Reich. Gen. von Luttwitz and the high-ranking official, Kapp, had learned that to their cost in 1921: they were in control of the city for four days, only to be reduced to impotence by a general strike that destroyed them.

When it was all over, the socialists and Communists were stronger than ever. There were 34,000 card-carrying members of either the Socialist or the Communist Party holding down key jobs in the Berlin administration alone.

It would later be seen how Joseph Goebbels – a born agitator, bold, a most popular orator, biting, sarcastic, fanatical – would spend five years capturing the worker bastions there one by one and making National Socialism the premier party in the capital of the Reich. In 1923, it was too soon. Hitler would almost certainly have broken his teeth on the bone of Berlin, even though he had success momentarily in Munich. His failure was in reality a fortunate thing for his career. Before taking possession of the State, it was absolutely essential that he first conquer the German people. It was only on their shoulders that he could come to power.

There were also flaws in the Munich situation, not all of them Hitler's fault. The hurried change in the program had forced him suddenly to throw over the plan meant for the 11th of November and improvise an attack on the 8th of November. It

was too quickly prepared. Certain gross errors were thus committed, which Hitler would no doubt have avoided if he'd had more time available in which to completely change the basis of an operation originally intended for three days later.

In the first hours of the putsch, everything had gone marvelously. The first to get under way had been Ernst Röhm and a few hundred storm troopers whom he had very discreetly gathered together at the *Löwenbräu*. All of a sudden Röhm announced the big news to his troops, that Hitler had just „caught” all the important men of Munich: State President Knilling, Commissioner-General Gustav von Kahr, Gen. Otto von Lossow, Chief of Police Hans von Seisser and all the bigwigs of the administration and of finance and commerce. The fishing boat was frill. All of them were joining the revolution. Hitler had become the political leader of it, or, in other words, the dictator.

This tremendous news provoked an unprecedented uproar among those hearing it. Many soldiers had been sitting at tables with the storm troopers. They now all tore off the republican and separatist insignia from their uniforms, jumped up on the tables and chairs, hugged one another and sang the national anthem at the top of their voices.

They had to go into action at once. Preceded by a thundering band (in the middle of the night), cheered and then followed by many Munich citizens who had jumped from their beds in all haste, Röhm's centurions proceeded triumphantly through the principal streets of the town. „The enthusiasm of jubilant onlookers was heady,” noted historian John Toland.

A detail which must not be omitted: during the 15 hours that preceded the ultimate massacre, not a single untoward incident occurred in the streets anywhere, not even in the districts most subject to Marxist propaganda.

It is obvious that Hitler, in 1923, had already had a profound effect on public opinion in Munich. The reports made by the police after the events are unanimous on that point. There was not a single dust-up in Munich between the socialists, Communists, and the National Socialists. Not even a punch thrown by an individual. The National Socialists paraded through every street in Munich as though right at home, flags flying, bands making an enormous din in the night. Röhm did not have to take any precautionary measures. On Hitler's orders, sent by motorcycle, Röhm went with his centurions to the War Ministry, the seat of the military authority. No one had to be shot. After a few brief explanatory words, Röhm took possession of the premises.

The ministry building was immediately transformed into the military center of the National Socialists and reinforced without delay by hundreds of cadets, the elite

of the army, who arrived burning with patriotism. Other cadets had meanwhile taken possession of the police headquarters, the seat of the civil authority.

The finances had been immediately assured. A Munich printing house owned by a Jewish Ann belonging to the Masson Parcus Brothers had in its shops, on the night of the putsch, the government reserves, a fabulous fortune, at least theoretically: 14,650,000 billion marks – not very much in reality at a time when a sandwich at the greasy spoon cost hundreds of millions.

Certain bills in this depository bore the fantastic figure of 50 billion marks – enough to purchase half of Germany in 1914. In this printing establishment, as everywhere, German order and discipline would reign unbroken: on that night, with the revolution in full swing, the Parcus brothers simply asked for a receipt, which they received immediately. This demand did not astonish any assailant Max Amann, the strictest financier of the party, signed the receipt.

If the revolutionaries had requisitioned a bag of French fries, they would in the same manner have given the vendor a receipt in due form, perfectly handwritten. This wasn't Germany for nothing. At that hour – it was past midnight – everything was going well, whether it concerned political authority, military authority, or a simple question of administration. „In point of fact,“ German historian Joachim Fest would conclude, „the chances of the undertaking were not bad at all. Just as was noted in the forenoon, public opinion was absolutely inclined in favor of Hitler and of the 'Kampfbund.' At the town hall, as well as on the balconies of numerous important buildings and houses, the swastika flag had been raised.“

An incident then occurred that was apparently trifling, but which was going to have fatal consequences a few hours later. The former autonomist leaders who had rallied to Hitler's support – von Kahr, von Lossow and Seisser – had been committed to the care of Gen. Ludendorff. It was getting late. The gentlemen said they were fatigued by the lateness of the hour and by the emotion. They desired to go to bed. In Germany in those days, a conscientious bourgeois put his nightcap on his head at 9:00 in the evening.

What else was left for them – Kahr, Lossow and Seisser – to do? They had publicly given their approval. They weren't going to run through the streets after the drummers and bass drums. Why, they asked Ludendorff, don't you let us go to bed? It was 10:30 P.M. They gave Ludendorff their word of honor that they would remain true to the oath they had sworn three hours earlier.

Gen. Ludendorff, for all his craftiness, did not guess what they were up to. For him, they had sworn fidelity, they were military men as he was, and their word was enough for him.

It should not have been enough for him. These candidates for the pillory had already gone back on their word a month before: Kahr, who had sworn fidelity to the Constitution, had rejected it; Lossow, who had given the Reichswehr his oath to be a disciplined soldier, had rebelled.

Having forfeited their honor once, why would they have had any scruples about forfeiting it a second time, about trampling on a public commitment a second time? Ludendorff, along with Hindenburg, was the most glorious military leader of World War I. He trusted his two associates and the colonel and amiably shook hands with them. Good night They would see one another the next day.

A few minutes later Hitler reappeared. He was appalled at seeing that the three birds had flown. He was very nearly seized with panic, for if these three thieves, once on the loose, were able to come out against the then triumphant revolution, an enormous backlash could smack him right in the face. With a great deal of tact, Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter explained to Ludendorff what he had perhaps set in motion. The general treated him with scorn. To suspect an officer of disloyalty seemed to him the absolute crime: „I forbid you to question the word of a German officer.” Meanwhile, the officer who was „above suspicion” and the „lieutenant of the monarchy” had disappeared into the night.

Betraying his word as a general was certainly infamous enough in itself. And Lossow hesitated before doing it He would be made to flip-flop by three of his colleagues after he had gotten back to his own office. Three generals were there, as a matter of fact, with the now forgotten names of Darrer, Ruith and Kress. Three military men steeped in conformity. They took it upon themselves to plague von Lossow with their warnings and soon had him vacillating. Already, on their own, they had alerted the outlying garrisons at Augsburg, Passau and Landshut without von Lossow’s authorization. And without having wished it, he was committed. He thought a moment of his oath to Ludendorff. Was he going to go back on it, or not?

He caved in. And since Hitler and his men might fall upon him and give him no alternative but to forswear himself a third time, he left his office and took refuge in one of the barracks. As for Kahr, he really had wanted to go to bed. He had just been told that a detachment of cadets was coming and would occupy his commissioner’s office at any moment Like Lossow, he ran to the barracks of the 19th Infantry Regiment, the only barracks he could still count on.

Why? Because a catastrophe had occurred there.

Contrary to some ossified calculating generals, the soldiers and young officers had for the most part followed the National Socialists in their revolt.

Hitler's centurions had made the round of the barracks without any special incident. However, it had been necessary to modify arrangements quickly on the 8th of November. An important operation had been neglected: the seizing at the very first moment of the means of communication, wireless telegraph and telephone. Hitler ought to have made that a priority operation. With that under his control, Hitler could have completed his revolution without a hitch that same night.

These communication networks neglected by the putschists were left in the hands of their regular operatives, for none of the putschists had even gotten into that section of the barracks. Cutting off communications between this center and the outside could have been achieved in a trice. The fact that Hitler had not ordered this done is one more proof that he did not wish to impose his *coup d'état* by force. After having won over to his operation the three pests of the *Bürgerbräu*, he was certain he would have the voluntary support of the population, as evidenced by the immediate plebiscite of the street.

He could have taken over any of the barracks; but he had on the contrary forbidden any violence. He wished to see the army unite behind him in complete fraternity. Hitler would not force anyone to give assistance against his Mill. This noninterference was almost comical: in one room of the barracks of the 19th Infantry Regiment, which were also occupied by Röhm's militia, leaders of the putsch were enthusiastically conferring, while on the other side of the partition wall the military radio was in full operation. Lossow, flabbergasted by this miracle, was going to be able to make use of it as he pleased for an hour before the Hitler detachment occupying the barracks had any idea of its existence and cut off its use.

In the meantime Lossow had dispatched the order to neighboring garrisons to send reinforcements. At the same time he had been able to let the press agencies know that he was rescinding his adherence to the *coup d'état* and that any of the military who supported the putsch would be charged with treason. With that spurring him on, Kahr came back to life and outlawed the National Socialist Party and issued a decree banning the party newspaper and confiscating all its assets. By the time Hitler's men became aware of the use by their opponents of the radio transmitter they had all failed to note, the damage was done. All von Lossow's orders and counter orders had been sent.

CHAPTER 29

HITLER'S PUTSCH OF NOV. 9, 1923

Seen from a distance, Adolf Hitler's putsch of Nov. 9, 1923 seemed an absurdity, a rash impulse at the wrong time. That is exactly what it was. *Coups d'état* were very fashionable in Germany after the great dive of 1918. Who hadn't given it a try? Every region of Germany in those years, or even in those months, had known its *coup d'état*, almost the way every infant sooner or later got chicken pox.

Those who didn't attempt a coup dreamed of doing it. Thousands of old war rifles were aimed in every direction. It was the left, moreover, that had set the style of these *coups d'état*. On Nov. 9, 1918, it will be remembered, the socialists and Communists had revolted against the constitutional regime in force quite illegally at two-hour intervals, without a Reichstag vote of any kind and without consulting the electorate. Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Social Democrats and former proletarian, had made his *coup d'état* in a frock coat, opening up a window of the parliament building and proclaiming the republic. Beyond any law, he overturned not only a government, but the constitutional system of the state, the monarchy of Frederick the Great of the 18th century and that of Wilhelm I, who had proclaimed the unity of Germany at Versailles on the 18th of January of 1871.

A crimson socialist who arrived in a car with a red flag in his lap was all it took to kick the constitution into the street, and the imperial regime at the same time. This *coup d'état* was hardly over before the Spartacists (Communists and Communist sympathizers) had made another one. This time their leader, Karl Liebknecht, had proclaimed the Red revolution from the top of the stairway of the very palace of the then still reigning emperor. Two leftist *coups d'état* almost simultaneously. Two rival coups.

During the weeks that had followed, the two groups of competitors had vigorously slugged it out with each other. It would not be until the following year, in January of 1919, that elections, with two months delay, would more or less ratify the two *coups d'état* of the socialist left and the Communist left.

„Vladimir“ Lenin, the patron saint of Communism, had seized power in Petrograd in October of 1917, not by making an appeal to the voters, but by hurling a few tens of thousands of Red Guards in an onslaught against the old Russia. To assure their dictatorial power in a land where their political adherents at that time represented only 2 or 3 percent of the population, the Leninists had crushed the

Ukrainian nationalists, the Cossacks, the Tartars, the Crimeans – anyone who got in their way.

The Red Army had even come close to taking Warsaw and planting their bayonets in the hides of the Polish voters who naively believed – as they would believe again in 1945 – that Marxist democracy was established by voting. That would be the permanent *coup d'état* in Russia for three-quarters of a century. For the benefit of the world boobs, there would be a vote from time to time in the countries with proletarian dictatorships for a single list of candidates (protesters beware!) with results regularly around 99.9 percent.

The Communists of Germany did not have any say either. It was Moscow that earlier gave the orders from its embassy in Berlin in 1918, then from the secret hideouts of Radek and Tukhachevsky in 1923. If the Communist leaders in Germany had not been incompetent windbags, their *coup d'état* could have succeeded both times.

Social Democrats and Communist Spartacists alike, every one of them had played at *coup d'état*, thereby flouting everything: the Constitution, their oaths of office, and – at the least cost – their fine principles.

On the right, indisputably, they were no more scrupulous. The „Free Corps,“ who saw action in the Baltic countries, didn't give a tinker's damn about democracy. Gen. von Luttwitz afterward and Dr. Wolfgang Kapp, the high official [born in New York, 1868 – Ed.], wanted to sweep away the Weimar Regime with artillery fire. The government had fled piteously enough, thus avoiding casualties. Its response had been as antidemocratic as the *coup d'état*. It had paralyzed the latter by ordering a general strike of the bakeries and transport companies. It was thus only by famine that the ousted regime had been reestablished. On Sept 26, 1923, Chancellor Ebert and Council President Gustav Stresemann, entangled in their incessant ministerial crises, had made use of Article 84 of the Weimar Constitution to entrust the power which was slipping out of their hands – and teetering toward total disorder – to Gen. Hans von Seeckt and War Minister Otto Gessler.

These men, too, no more and no less than the others, had indulged in a *coup d'état*, discreetly but unequivocally. Their decisions had allowed the army to subdue the Communist rioters. But the recourse to bayonets, though it had been spectacular, had also unquestionably been illegal inasmuch as the law granting the army full powers had not yet been ratified by the German parliament.

Those were troubled times. The Weimar Assembly had been stillborn and grew less effective year after year. In 1923 it no longer counted for anything. Amid this anarchy and these dangers everyone believed himself charged with a redemptive

mission. The virtually constant Communist revolution, the foreign invasion of the Ruhr, the ruin and the famine were all motives badgering one to seek and to improvise solutions. None of them could get through the Reichstag. It was a parliament that had never had either legs for marching or brains for thinking. It was the most useless parliament in the democratic history of the century, accomplishing nothing and passing into oblivion without leaving a trace. The *coup d'état* had become an almost obligatory recourse in Germany. Everyone had used and abused it. The idea of a dictatorship had entered everyone's mind. It had become as natural as the notion of a dietetic cure. Even Stresemann, a very formal minister who was frightened by the mere buzzing of a wasp, accepted it with no other reservation than the choice of the dictator.

„It all depends,” he declared at the Walhalla Theater in Halle, Germany on Nov. 11, 1923, „on the personality of the dictator, who, in any case is subject to the economic necessities.”

That was the universal watchword. The only concern was knowing who would be the dictator, and how he would solve the economic problem.

That same autumn of 1923, the Bavarian Gustav von Kahr – just like the Ebert of 1918 or his rival, Liebknecht – had broken off with the Berlin regime and with the legal government. Studying the matter, one sees that things had been much more illegal in Bavaria than anywhere else. As a matter of fact there had been not just one *coup d'état* at Munich in 1923, but two contradictory *coups d'état* coming one on top of the other, becoming entangled with each other and then both coming to naught. Hitler's rash impulse was not the first Bavarian *coup d'état*; it was only a response to it. Hitler, to be sure, had dreamed, as so many others before him, of raising himself to power.

„For three years,” he declared, „I have thought of nothing but a *coup d'état*.”

It was more than an idea; it was an obsession. In that at least, he was almost like everyone else. At Munich in November 1923, he was going to be left little time by his competitors. These competitors were ex-Minister von Kahr and his acolytes. They had just risen against Berlin, after Ebert and Stresemann had dismissed them in a way on Sept. 26, 1923.

On that day, the government, at the end of its resources, had entrusted the army with the saving of an undivided Germany, which von Kahr and his associates did not want at any price, opposed as they were to all centralization. They had rebelled. This separatist *coup d'état*, though still only in the development stage, was precisely the opposite of what Hitler wished to achieve. He was determined to remake and enlarge a great and powerful German empire, in which the diverse regions would be

welded together indisputably and indestructibly.

In November 1923, Hitler undoubtedly had at his disposal the most disciplined and best structured political movement in Germany. The other parties marshaled 10 times as many members but had no backbone. Hitler could count on a hundred thousand resolute, disciplined and fanatical partisans. Shock troops of an exceptional political worth, but still small in numbers. And limited almost entirely to the region of Bavaria for Hitler, Bavaria was not really a goal. It was just a point of departure. What Hitler meant to conquer and transform was the entire Reich. His battle cry was „*Auf nach Berlin*“ („On to Berlin“), whereas the Bavarian autonomists who had just risen against the capital and against the military dictatorship proclaimed on Sept. 26 wanted exactly the opposite: „*Los von Berlin*“ („Free from Berlin“). The one meant to reconstitute and enlarge the Reich; the other proposed to dismember it.

That above all was what the Munich putsch was about. Would the Bavarian separatists have the boldness to pull away from Berlin completely? Or would Hitler overtake them at the last turn. It would be a race between a suburbanized sexagenarian, von Kahr, the leader of the coalition against Berlin – a man slow to make decisions, evasive, rather fainthearted – and the young long-distance runner, Hitler, bold, rough, resolved to surmount all obstacles in order to beat von Kahr to the goal.

Von Kahr had been named state commissioner general of Bavaria on Sept 26, 1923 by the president of the Bavarian government Eugen von Knilling, who was already in semi-rebellion against the Berlin government. The latter had learned of von Kahr's nomination only through a dispatch of the Wolf agency. But by virtue of Article 48 of the Constitution, it was Gen. von Seeckt and, under his orders, Gen. Gessler, who had the nominating power. Before 48 hours were up, a second conflict was going to arise between the military authorities of the Reich and the man in charge of the army in Bavaria, Gen. Otto von Lossow, the commander of defense District VII. Added to the civil rebellion of von Kahr was a military rebellion characterized by this general as still more catastrophic for the unity of the Reich. The motive?

Rather insignificant all told. Gen. Gessler had ordered Lossow by wire to seize Hitler's newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, „by force if necessary.“ The *Völkischer Beobachter*, which had committed the crime of *lese majeste* the day before by having given Gen. von Seeckt a going-over and having made less than amiable allusions – another crime of *lese majesté* – to von Seeckt's dragon-lady spouse, the most eminent Dorothea Jacobson. In response to this order of the minister of the army, another telegram, short and scathing, had been sent immediately by von Lossow to his chief in Berlin: „*Befehl unausführbar*“ („the order cannot be carried out“). Bluntly put, it was a flat refusal on the general's part to obey his Minister. That signified a split. The

government's Reichswehr would no longer be obeyed in Munich. Its delegate in Bavaria was in revolt against it Von Lossow was uniting with von Kahr. The *coup d'état*, civil and military, was thus complete.

In truth, Gen. von Lossow's convictions did not date just from that autumn of 1923. He had previously made a very revealing remark. His solution aimed at liquidating the nation's unity: „If everything collapses, let each land shift for itself.“ Some months beforehand, since the Ruhr, this prospect of separatism had not alarmed him. He just hadn't bothered to put it into words. The immediate response: President Ebert fired Gen. Lossow.

Von Lossow was thus just a cashiered mutineer in his Munich post Von Kahr named him *Landeskommandant* of a purely Bavarian army. On every barracks ground in Munich, officers and soldiers were called upon to take an oath to the rebel general. All complied with the exception of two generals who declared it unconstitutional. But 24 superior officers became accomplices of the rebel at the seat of the military district where Lossow had been installed as the big boss. The general in breach of discipline formally refused to obey President Ebert and his own military chiefs. One more putsch. Although it did not go beyond the stage of words, from that day on there were two „emergency states“ in opposition to each other, that of the central Reich, which decreed von Kahr and von Lossow illegal; and that of von Kahr and von Lossow, who thumbed their noses at Ebert and sent the Berlin government packing.

The quarrel was going to become more and more irremediable.

- Sept. 28, 1923: On his own authority, von Kahr abrogated, for the whole territory of Bavaria, the „law on the defense of the republic“ decreed by the Berlin government by virtue of article 48 of the Constitution. In other words, the central government from that day no longer had any power in Bavaria.
- Oct 1: the order was given by Berlin to Gen. von Lossow to proceed to arrest an officer accused of „felony treason.“ Lossow immediately responded with a categorical refusal.
- Oct 18: the minister of the Reichswehr fired Gen. von Lossow and named Gen. Kress von Kressenstein to take his place.

Response: the Bavarian government publicly broke off all relations with official Germany. It confirmed Gen. von Lossow in his new post as military commandant of the army of Bavaria. It released the officers and soldiers of the Seventh Division from their oath of loyalty to the national Reichswehr and took the Seventh Division under

its own authority.

- Oct 27: Final action by President Ebert: He called upon von Kahr to respect the Constitution. Total refusal. Von Kahr went further and concentrated troops on the northern border of Bavaria.
- Nov. 4, 1923: Gen. von Lossow prepared the creation of a Bavarian directorate consisting of himself, of course, former state commissioner von Kahr, and former chief of police Col. Hans von Seisser. An essential detail: this directorate would be established „pending the probable return of the Wittelsbaclis.”

This was not just rupture with Berlin: they would shortly proceed to the separatist restoration of the fallen monarchy.

The plan was clear separation from Berlin and reinstatement (without consulting the citizenry) of a puppet dynasty which had not been capable of anything but taking to its heels when a madman, the Jewish Kurt Eisner, had seized the royal palace on Nov. 9, 1918. The heir, Rupprecht of Bavaria, had dreamed of reappearing at Berlin, in the event of restoration, as the successor to the fallen emperor. For the moment he was falling back on the crown of Bavaria that had been thrown away by the family a few years earlier. Even that crown, scoured clean by von Kahr and von Lossow, might look well on his noggin once again. The Kahr-Lossow conspiracy was thus a double one: against Berlin and at the same time for the restoration of a regional dynasty separating Bavaria from the Reich. Raymond Poincaré couldn't have dreamed up anything better.

But it was precisely what Hitler found execrable. That kind of separatism would mark the collapse of his plans for a greater Germany. Once Bavaria had separated, it would then be the turn of the Palatinate, of the Ruhr, of the Rhineland (Hugo Stinnes's famous „duchy”). And perhaps even the turn of East Prussia, which was also being worked on by the separatists. Separatism was as formidable an enemy of the Reich as Communism. Both would be swept away, or they would see the Reich go down. Hitler, however, was not able to do what he wanted at Munich. A heavily armed division (the Seventh Division of the ex-Reichswehr, now passed into the hands of Lossow) was a very difficult obstacle to remove, in spite of the fact, as everyone knew, that the obligatory swearing of allegiance to Lossow by the young officers and soldiers had been neither voluntary nor sincere.

A great asset for Hitler, however, was the pusillanimity of Gen. von Lossow. He was weak-willed. He was hesitant about committing himself too definitely. The notion that he could lose his gilded epaulets bothered him. He didn't want to take a chance unless the definite success of the *coup d'état* could be assured. He would

undertake it, he said, „only when he was certain of a 51 percent chance of carrying it off.” When is one ever sure ahead of time that a *coup d'état* has 51 chances out of a hundred of being successful?

It is character that assures the odds. A weak man will fail with an 80 percent chance; a strong man will win with one of 20 percent. Gen. von Lossow would miss the boat because he didn't have the guts for it. He would let himself be overtaken by Hitler at the start, even though he had a lead of a hundred meters on him at the outset. Even though he had a troop of 12,000 rifles and considerable heavy armament, he would cave in on the night of Nov. 8, 1923, the moment he saw Hitler's revolver under his nose.

To neutralize the pan-German Hitler, von Kahr, the separatist and regionalist, had taken pains from the very first day to prohibit any National Socialist meeting. The *Völkischer Beobachter* had been suspended – even though it had not been when the order for it had come from Berlin a month earlier. Hitler's situation at the beginning of November 1923 was as complicated as could be. On the one hand, he did not wish at any cost to oppose the soldiers of the Reichswehr, even if they were temporarily under the thumb of von Lossow and von Kahr; on the other hand, much information was being kept from him.

But his private information was explicit: the definite move by von Kahr's and von Lossow's people, passing from threats and rebellion to action, was imminent. Besides, why should they constrain themselves when they had a considerable military force and could see the Berlin government, undermined from all sides, on the point of resigning for the nth time? Hitler meant to nullify this anti-national coup before it occurred. He would have to act quickly and strongly, however feeble the means at his disposal. He decided that he would forestall von Kahr. He set the day: the 11th of November, a significant day since it recalled the 11th of November 1918 and the collapse of the Germany he intended to reestablish in all her power.

The plan was prepared immediately: on Nov. 10, 1923, the military commander of his Kampfbund and the head of the SA would assemble their men (several thousands) under the pretext of night maneuvers to the north of the city of Munich. In the morning, he knew, the most important contingents of the army would be detained by the commemoration of the armistice. As if they, too, were coming to take part in the day of remembrance, Hitler's men would move in columns into the heart of Munich. In a brief surprise attack and without casualties – since the troops would be on official service – they would seize all the centers of power of the town, which was more or less demilitarized. Hitler was not unaware either that the guards that day would be reduced almost to zero at the post offices, on the bridges, in the newspaper printing plants, and above all at the army district command post. Lossow would be away, attending the parade from the top of the official platform. Once

everything was in place, Gen. Erich Ludendorff and Hitler would announce that they were assuming power. Von Kahr and von Lossow had almost no popular support. The people would rally to Hitler, backed up by Ludendorff, a national legend. Under those conditions it was probable that von Kahr and von Lossow would bow before *the fail accompli*.

Why call in Gen. Ludendorff? Hitler did not like him especially. He was authoritarian, standoffish, peremptory with his subordinates. Moreover, he was obsessed by strange whims. His wife, Marguerite, was eccentric; she wanted to found a new religion based on mysterious precepts of a vague antiquity. Ludendorff had fallen into step with his prophetess like a recruit. That was his negative side and was little known.

The positive side was Ludendorff's prestige. He had been one of the two great military leaders of the Reich. One further success in mid-July of 1918 close by Reims, and he would have entered Paris. The Germans were proud of his past and his grand bearing. Whenever he appeared, stem-visaged, his uniform covered with decorations, his pointed helmet gleaming in the sun, the public cheered. Patriotically speaking, he was precisely the right person to serve as front man. Hitler had therefore flattered him and heaped praise upon him. If he triumphed, Ludendorff would become one of the great stars of the Reich. That prospect pleased his pride, which was considerable. So there he was in November 1923 involved in the planning of Hitler's *coup d'etat*. His great saber awaited him on the game table of his residence.

Surely von Kahr had gotten wind of this imminent counter-putsch? Or had he been warned by one or another of Lossow's spies? One thing is certain: that with each of them seeking to gain a step on the other, von Kahr announced a big meeting for the 8th of November, two days before the night when Hitler's troops were to march on Munich. If von Kahr announced decisively on that 8th of November that he was reestablishing a kingdom of Bavaria under the authority of Prince Rupprecht and at the same time told Berlin to go to the devil, Hitler's plan would be annihilated. His plan for a united Germany would be finished and his movement banned. Hitler had to act swiftly. It was also no longer possible to maintain the anticipated date of Nov. 10 for the putsch. It had to be set immediately for the 8th of November, the day of von Kahr's meeting. It was already the 7th of November. Hitler had only 24 hours in which to effect a total change strategically and tactically in his planned maneuver. The arrangements decided on for the 11th of November no longer made any sense. He had to come up with a parade immediately.

What parade? Hitler was a man of imagination and quick to make a decision. He immediately decided that the battle would be conducted at the very place where von Kahr intended to be first to act His big meeting of Nov. 8 at the *Bthyerbräukdler* was inevitably going to bring together all of the civil and military authorities of

Munich, as well as several thousand of the town's notables: all of Bavaria's elite. And if Hitler netted all of them in one haul?

And if, at the very place where von Kahr was preparing to set forth his plans, he, Hitler, set forth and imposed his own? Crowds were cowardly and fickle. Lossow, though a general, bore little resemblance to the god Mars. And von Kahr was just a high-ranking civil servant: was he going to stand fast under the booming cannon of Hitler's voice? On this occasion, Hitler doubtless had no other choice. A 51 percent chance of success was required by the learned calculations of a von Lossow. Hitler had only a slight chance.

The bourgeois audience might shout him down and eject him. He even risked getting arrested before having said a word. For once von Kahr and von Lossow could act – who knows – like Bayard on the bridge of Garigliano or Bonaparte on the bridge of Arcole.

But for Hitler there was no hesitating. A slim chance? In any case it was the only chance left. Otherwise, in the dawn of Nov. 9, everything would be definitely lost for him, for his party and for the unity of Germany.

The affair would be carried out boldly. Hitler had not told anyone of the change in plans, not even Ludendorff. He took care to disguise his intentions to the point of chatting for a long time that afternoon at the Cafe Heck, the most public place in Munich, in the company of his friend Hoffmann, the photographer, who was a notorious gossip. Hitler left him after two hours of trifling conversation, explaining that he had a fierce headache. Hoffmann, with no longer any thought that there might be a coup in the offing, soon went to bed. It was von Lossow's police that Hitler had wished to deceive. While Munich was seething with excitement before von Kahr's meeting, he had passed several hours in an extremely well-known establishment sipping coffee. What police informer would ever believe that this tranquil customer would be a „putschist“ just two hours later?

Hitler had only just chosen a few bodyguards, who were unaware of their mission. He had them get into his big red Mercedes-Benz. Goering, beside him, was carrying his steel helmet in a parcel. Hitler himself was wearing a morning coat concealed under his trench coat (this was at a time when persons of distinction still wore funereal clothes). He had pinned on his Iron Cross. The police had not in the least anticipated any-thing. The secrecy of Hitler's plot had been absolute. Meanwhile, 600 storm troopers had been rounded up by Goering in *the Bürgerbräukeller*, a big beer garden, supposedly just to toss off a few beers.

They soon slipped into the darkness around the *Bürgerbräukeller*. The great hall there was filled to capacity by 3,000 people, especially rich people. His Excellency,

von Kahr, was on the platform, solemnly attired in a frock coat, as was to be expected. In a monotone, he began to reel off a ponderous speech. His monarchy the next day would certainly be no joke.

It was 8:45 in the evening. Hitler and two of his faithful supporters, Alfred Rosenberg and Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter (who would be slain the next day) were watching, out of sight behind a pillar at the end of the hall. Suddenly there was tumult Von Kahr, terrified, yelled: „Its the Communists!“

It was Hitler. Twenty-two storm troopers – not one more – had just burst open the door at the end of the hall and were training a machine gun at the audience. Hitler leaped onto a chair and fired a shot into the ceiling from his revolver. General panic ensued. Chairs were overturned every which way. A Cabinet minister took cover under a table. On the platform, von Kahr, scared stiff, was white as the sheets of his marital bed. Without saying a word, he looked at Hitler, who was climbing up beside him on the platform.

„The national revolution has begun,“ Hitler shouted. „Six hundred men armed to the teeth have surrounded this hall. We are in control everywhere in Munich. The army has come over to our side. In a few minutes they will be here with our storm troopers.“ The audience was on edge, bewildered and annoyed. Goering got on the platform and jeeringly aroused them into the beginnings of good humor while Hitler led away von Kahr, von Lossow and von Seisser into an adjoining room. Hitler put it to them squarely: „You’re nothing now. Would you like to become something again in a joint government?“

Rather than violence, Hitler preferred to solve things without a brawl. These three men were the extreme opposite of everything he wanted and of everything that he was personally. But to this large, well-to-do audience, they represented conformity and tranquility. If they were prepared to reappear as stopgaps in his revolutionary government, he was disposed to save for the moment their morning coats and gold braid.

„Your Excellency von Kahr; you will be regent of Bavaria.“

That didn’t commit Hitler too much, because he reserved for himself „the political direction of the new national government.“ If he directed everything, what else was there left to direct? In his plan, Regent von Kahr would very soon at most be filing dossiers and dusting his medals. Acting as if he had reached an agreement with the three men, who were still staggered by the events, Hitler returned to the platform. In just a few minutes he brought about „a total reversal of the situation.“ He hammered home each point of his speech: „I am now going to carry out the vow I made to myself five years ago when I was lying blind and disabled in a military

hospital bed: to know neither rest nor respite until a new, powerful and free Germany shall have arisen from the wretched Germany of today." The three thousand people had booed him at his arrival. At the end of a quarter of an hour, they were on their feet in a tumult of emotion, the men wildly excited, the women in tears.

„In a masterful speech," Karl Alexander von Mueller, a professor of the University of Munich, has related, „he turned the mood of the audience inside out like a glove. I have rarely attended such a spectacle." „Kahr, Lossow, Seisser," Hitler exclaimed, „support our national government. Are you in agreement with this solution for the German nation?" He left the platform, entrusted by the assembly with the mission of informing von Kahr that „the entire audience would follow him if he joined the revolt." Kahr, Lossow and Seisser were still vaguely hesitant. But they had heard the clamor proving to them that Hitler had turned their own audience right around. Suddenly present in the hall was the big gun: Gen. Ludendorff.

Ludendorff, if he had known, would doubtless not have approved Hitler's plan, which he would have thought too risky. But as he had acted, and as he would always act Hitler had informed, at the very last minute, only the men indispensable to him for the moment. The others would be informed in keeping with the flow of events. As soon as the hall had been taken by assault Scheubner-Richter had run out to fetch Ludendorff, who was in a bad humor and grumbling at not having been called until it was all over. He was hastily loaded into a car before he even had time to change his coat. His sudden entrance further increased the emotions stirring the audience. „What? Ludendorff is joining up, too? He's going up to Hitler?" That sort of legalizes the revolution. To Hitler's three semi-prisoners, Ludendorff said brusquely: „I am just as surprised as you are. But the step has been taken, and it concerns the German fatherland. I can say but one thing to you: be with us."

With us. He was joining Hitler as if the two of them together had effected the coup. Von Kahr gave his agreement „as the lieutenant of the monarchy," even though said Bavarian monarchy had sunk to the bottom of the lake of history and would never rise again. Hitler had not the slightest objection to Kahr's pompously awarding himself this sonorous title. Gen. von Lossow's adherence was still more concise: „Your Excellency's words are my command," he said to Ludendorff, quite happy to take shelter under his umbrella.

As for von Seisser, he glided like King Kaspar after kings Melchior and Balthazar, without even offering an historic word. The audience cheered at the reappearance of Hitler without his gun, of Ludendorff, dignified as a chamberlain of the Kaiser, and of the three survivors: Von Kahr, the supposed savior of the monarchy; Von Lossow, clicking his heels; and police Lieutenant Colonel Seisser,

who would have jailed Hitler half an hour earlier if he had been able to, and who was now quite happy to cling to the victor's coattails. As historian Fest recounts, „The group returned to the hall together and put on a show of fraternization. This demonstration of apparent unity was enough to get the audience climbing onto their chairs, and the actors shook hands to the cheers of the public.” Ludendorff raised the general level of enthusiasm with these words: „Seized by the greatness of the moment and by surprise,” he said, „I place myself at the disposal of the national government of the Reich.”

The crowd went out cheering the first National Socialist companies marching by in the streets. The *coup d'état* had been a master stroke. Acting boldly, Hitler had succeeded fantastically.

Thirteen hours later, however, all would be lost Hitler would be wounded; 14 of his comrades would be slain; and the revolution would come to a bloody end.



Gen. Erich von Ludendorff was the architect of the German war effort during World War I and its victory over Russia. He was forced out of power by the newly formed Bolshevik government in 1918, and dedicated the remainder of his career to fighting communism in Germany. An early patron of Adolf Hitler, with whom he is pictured here, Ludendorff developed the doctrine of Total War – of the total mobilization of the people to resist the oppressive nature of Soviet Russia.

CHAPTER 30

THE END OF HITLER'S WOULD-BE REVOLUTION

Best, the historian, has admitted straight out that Hitler could perfectly well have succeeded in his coup d'état, as he had anticipated, without resorting to violence: The fact that [Hitler] did not give the order to occupy the central telegraph offices and the ministries and did not make certain he had control of the railroad stations and barracks was in the logic of things. He did not seek in any way to seize power in Munich by revolution, but relying on the solid foundation given him by the power of the Bavarian capital, he proposed to march on Berlin.

Was Hitler naive, like Ludendorff, who had let Kahr and his associates get away, the very men who would ensure his defeat a few hours later? In the first place, he ought to have put his doubtful partners under lock and key until the outcome was assured. In the second place, when you are making a revolution, you cannot worry about casualties among the opposition. Once you decide to go ahead with it, you must immediately, at whatever cost, seize the means to control and command everything. If resistance should happen to arise in a sector as important as communications, it must be crushed relentlessly.

Nothing great in this life is accomplished by halves. Ideals are not enough; the opponent may scoff at them. Too great a concern for exercising restraint is utter sentimentalism in politics. And sentimentalism is not appropriate at a moment when everything is at stake in a revolution. Lenin taught that to the world in October of 1917. He didn't leave the Russian telephone and telegraph systems in the hands of his opponents. These media of rapid communication comprised the first objective Lenin pounced on. Hitler ought to have reread the history of the Bolshevik revolution before rushing into an undertaking with such obvious risks.

But Hitler, in truth, did not intend to imitate Lenin at all. He wished at all costs to avoid creating a breach between the army and himself, because it was with the army that he meant to create his new Germany.

A great blunder had been made in not taking over the army communications center. When Hitler learned of it – it was barely 11:00 in the evening – he could still easily have deprived Lossow of the use of the equipment. It would have been a matter of an armed attack of no more than a few minutes. Stubborn and true to his plan of conquest without firing a shot, he wished to avoid a military conflict.

Because Hitler was unwilling to act, the putsch, which was succeeding handsomely that night, would fail the following morning. The Bavarian regime, on its deathbed a few hours earlier, had been able to find new life thanks to a few telegraph keys and wires.

In the meantime another prominent figure had intervened: Prince Rupprecht. What was he drinking that night? He was a simple citizen, and far from an illustrious one, since all his family had yielded to the Marxist rabble on Nov. 9, 1918, exactly five years previously, abandoning Bavaria to a dreadful dictatorship of the riffraff that was rapidly transformed into a soviet republic of Bavaria.

The prince in question, roused in his castle, sent an emissary to Kahr and Lossow at half past one in the morning.

Was it to give them advice? No, to give them orders. In whose name, and in the name of what? Who had conferred any kind of a mandate on him? But Kahr wished to please him in all things, dreaming only of taking his place as soon as possible at the head of the Crown Council. Rupprecht had a particular hatred for Gen. Ludendorff: „Ludendorff is nothing but an intruder; he's a Prussian." That kind of German didn't interest him. It was only at Munich that he might get back the crown that his family had let fall at the feet of the rabble.

The solution recommended by this ex-heir to the crown *vis-à-vis* the putschists was that of extreme brutality: „Use the troops if necessary."

But at that point, the town of Munich was for the putschists, with all its heart. The National Socialist Party had enrolled 287 new members that very evening. Open recruitment offices in various parts of the town were doing a land-office business. In the military barracks, the men and the officers of junior grade sympathized joyfully with Hitler's actions and his marching plans.

Contrary to the desires of the Bavarian people, Prince Rupprecht was thus prepared to fire on his compatriots in order to get back his palace and his throne. He would be obeyed. A few hours later the center of Munich would be strewn with dead bodies. The night of Nov. 9, 1923 ended in confusion.

The rooftops would soon know the light of dawn. Everything grew worse. Was there anything Hitler could still do?

Upon receiving the bad news, Hitler was stunned. Ludendorff, dead tired, had tiptoed off to bed. Hitler would thus have to make the decisions alone.

Seizing the communications center of the 19th Infantry Regiment barracks by force and recapturing the lying von Kahr and von Lossow, occupying the railroad

station and the bridges – that was not impossible. Hitler had several thousand sure men available for that. But having them attack the barracks was not at all to his liking. He wanted his *coup d'état* to succeed because the people had supported and followed him, not because a faithless general and a hopelessly bourgeois official had first supported and then betrayed him. So he took no steps to conquer the last military stronghold of the regime. True to himself, he put his whole being that night into the task of rallying public opinion behind him. He meant to carry the day on the strength of public opinion, despite all his gold-braided and pencil-pushing opponents. They would have to yield when the people, solidly behind him, imposed their decision. „Propaganda, propaganda,“ Hitler told his night crew.

Propaganda had always been his decisive weapon, his artillery taking dead aim at whatever was in the way. He decided that 14 big „mass gatherings“ would be organized immediately. Starting at dawn the entire town would be mobilized. Thousands of Munich residents would be rallied in every district, and Hitler would address them all. Patrols would take to the streets in every direction spreading the watchword: „All flags flying.“

„Now we'll see,“ said Hitler, „if we can't create some enthusiasm.“

Create it they did. The forenoon passed most favorably. The town was everywhere bedecked with flags. The town's most important civic center, the town hall, had flown the swastika from the start. Across from it, Julius Streicher, mounted on a platform, was eloquently addressing a meeting. The crowd was at high pitch. Not one opponent, not a single Marxist or separatist could be heard. Not wanting to be left out of the revolution, Streicher is said to have cut short his speech and joined the rebels, falling into step immediately behind Hitler.

But in the face of this real Bavaria, official Bavaria since the night before had been setting its traps and its mines. Hitler decided, before holding his 14 mass meetings, to put on a great public propaganda demonstration that would proceed through the town from one end to the other, so that the people would have an opportunity to express an opinion that very morning. It was Ludendorff, more than Hitler, who had wanted this immediate parade. Hitler knew only too well that despite any amount of public cheering, a single volley of shots would suffice to put an end to his *coup d'état*.

„That was the most desperately daring decision of my life,“ he would later say.

The parade was rapidly formed. It was snowing. In the vanguard, men waved swastika banners and the old tricolor flags. Hitler, very pale and wrapped in his everlasting trench coat, followed. Goering had put on his steel helmet marked with the swastika. He was wearing a black leather coat against which could be seen his

Order of Merit insignia. Two thousand loyal supporters followed in orderly columns. At the end of the parade marched a numerous and somewhat irregular throng of former soldiers, cadets in uniform, young men, employees and tradesmen. One mark only identified them as a group: the swastika armband. Most remarkable of the leaders was Gen. Ludendorff, who wore a hunting jacket, as if he were going after an Alpine chamois.

„We set out,” Hitler has related, „with the conviction that in one way or another this would be the end. We set out singing.” Hitler, the history buff, was the only one to remember that Nov. 9, 1923 was the anniversary of Napoleon Bonaparte’s 18 Brumaire. The „little corporal” succeeded that day, just barely. That evening he was the master of France.

What would he, the other corporal, be this evening?

The demonstration reached the Ludwig Bridge, and the affair very nearly came to a bloody halt right then. The police commander had just ordered his guard detail to load their rifles. Goering made a rush at him. A hundred other demonstrators seized policemen, and the bridge was free. The street on the other side, the Zweibrueckenstrasse, started to seethe with excitement „The Zweibrueckenstrasse,” American historian John Toland writes, „was lined with people, many cheering enthusiastically and waving swastika flags. Bystanders began joining the parade. This enthusiasm inspired the marchers to sing their favorite *Storm Song*”

Toland continues: „In 15 minutes the men arrived at the Marienplatz, still festooned with swastika banners from the rallies. The Nazi flag still waved atop the City Hall, and a large crowd was singing patriotic songs.” Hitler was „received by the masses as a savior,” even Fest notes.

„We will go to the city and win the people to our side,” Hitler had announced. Plainly it had been done. It will never be sufficiently pointed out, if one wishes to be objective, that from the evening before, not a single Marxist nose had put in an appearance, Patriots and only patriots were everywhere. And German patriots. Not one separatist had appeared either, or uttered a cry, or made a wry face. Leaning on her elbows at her hotel window, Winifred Wagner waved at Hitler, who, for her, was the reincarnation of Parsifal or Lohengrin. Her eyes shining, she had once asked, „Do you not think he is destined to be the savior of Germany?”

It was under this feminine eye that tragedy, in a few moments, was going to sweep everything away.

The energetic demonstrators, singing *O Deutschland hoch in Ehren* („Oh Germany, High in Honor”), had resumed their march amid the crowds cheering

them more and more. The procession moved toward the *Feldhermhalle*, the Hall of the Marshals, a monument built in a strange Florentine style (a copy of the Loggia dei Lanci) and intended to recall the great glories of the Reich. It was there – by chance or incredible bad luck – that Ludendorff, who was in the lead, instead of taking a wide avenue, led the procession into the Residenzstrasse, a small and rather narrow street. Anywhere else, and the police would not have been able to set up a barrier. In numbers they were not a 50th of the demonstrators. It was only in such a death trap that they could bar the way. And Ludendorff had just led the marchers into this trap.

It was just a matter of seconds. For a long time, it was not known who had fired the first shot. A lieutenant of the state police, named Godin, stated in his report that it was one of Hitler's men who had fired first. Godin later retracted and established, by drawing a sketch that clinched the matter, that it was the police who had opened fire. In the flash of an eye there were 14 dead men strewn on the ground.

Bauriedl, the standard-bearer, soaked the flag with his blood as he died, a flag that would ever after be known in the history of Nazism as the *Blutfahne*, the Blood Flag. Goering had received a bullet in the groin. He was carried on men's backs, in an almost desperate state, across the Tyrol mountains to Italy. He would put in more than a year before he recovered, and then only imperfectly, with residual pains that could be relieved only by drugs. The unjust reputation he was given of being a drug addict had no other basis than that.

And Hitler? At the moment of the volley he gave his arm to an officer, his true friend Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter. The latter, hit by a bullet right in the lung, fell down dead, dragging Hitler with him in his fall. The man next to him, Ulrich Graf, instantly threw himself onto the body of the Führer and was hit by six bullets meant for Hitler. Ludendorff, stiffly erect, had continued to advance toward the men firing. They put down their rifles then and let the general pass, immutable, one hand in a pocket of his cape.

Hitler painfully struggled free of the bodies of his dead comrades about him. He had suffered a fractured humerus when he hit the ground. Around him all was blood and moaning. A physician, Dr. Walther Schultz, helped him into a medical vehicle and drove him to the entrance of the old cemetery, a sinister relay station, while waiting for him to be evacuated.

In the city, the anger of the crowd was intense. The police were spat upon from all sides. „The indignant citizens,” John Toland, the historian, writes, „cried: ‘Get the hell out of here, Jew defenders, betrayers of the Fatherland, dirty dogs. *Heil Hitler*. Down with Kahr.’”

The National Socialists were still in possession of the streets. In closed ranks the

Landshut unit paraded defiantly to the station, singing, and bearing the swastika and the steel helmet.

Röhm and his storm troopers were holding the military headquarters of Wehrkreis VII, the center of Gen. von Lossow's power. Von Lossow himself was still in the barracks of the Second Artillery Regiment, where he had taken refuge. But what point was there in continuing an operation that no longer made any sense? Röhm had just learned that all the leaders of the movement were dead or wounded. Everywhere it was affirmed that Hitler had succumbed. Gen. von Epp, who was rather disposed to favor Nazism and had no ties with Lossow, endeavored to act as intermediary and was successful in arranging it so that Röhm and his loyal troops could evacuate the official building without anyone being arrested.

Röhm carried out a final, and particularly spectacular, parade through the streets of Munich. Carrying their dead upon their backs, the members of the procession walked through the city, unarmed, in a silent farewell march. Again this time there was not a hostile cry. The man who marched in the lead and carried the flag was a young Catholic. He would be spoken of one day: His name was Heinrich Himmler.

Frau von Scheubner-Richter, hastening to her husband's dead body, spoke these words worthy of the ancients: „This is terrible, but that is the fate of an officer's wife.“

Hitler, during this time, despite the terrible suffering caused by his arm, had started out on foot to seek refuge. He recalled the villa of his friend Ernst „Putzi“ Hanfetaengl, whose wife, Helene, was a young and very beautiful American woman. It may seem astonishing, but it was thus an American woman who was going to take Hitler in and hide him that evening after the putsch had failed.

Hitler had arrived at the little country home, near the church of the village of Uffing on Lake Staffel, around 4:00 in the afternoon. Helene, seeing Hitler at the end of his strength and in agony from his injury, at first wanted him to lie down and rest. But the pain kept getting worse. His arm was swollen enormously. Hitler even believed that he had been hit by a bullet. It was only after long effort that Dr. Schultz and an aid man who had accompanied him succeeded in setting the fracture, without any anesthesia, of course. The young American woman heard his groans of pain through the door.

A long time afterward, in the United States, she wrote down some fascinating memories of the life of the wounded Hitler given shelter beneath her roof. She put her English traveling coat over his injured shoulder. Hitler did not close his eyes all night. He appeared at lunch draped in a huge bathrobe belonging to his friend,

Helene's husband, who had disappeared at the end of the fusillade. „I feel like a pseudo-Roman senator,” Hitler said, a wan smile playing on his gaunt face. At night he asked that the shutters be closed. They would be looking for him everywhere by this time. He sensed the predators on the prowl.

The telephone rang. The police were engaged in searching the house of Helene's mother, also an American. Relentless as Cerberus, they were surely going to visit the other house at any moment Hitler drew his revolver.

„What are you doing?” his hostess cried. She seized his hand and wrested from him the revolver he had ready to fire. „Think of all your loyal followers who believe in you. How can you forsake all those good people who share your ideal of saving your country, while you take your own life?”

Hitler covered his face with his hands. The young American ran immediately into another room and hid the revolver in a barrel of flour. Meanwhile Hitler had gotten hold of himself. Helene brought him some blank sheets of paper. He calmly dictated his instructions: Max Amann, his financial manager, would have to take care of all business matters; Alfred Rosenberg was to be responsible for the party newspaper and to direct the party in his absence; Ernst Hanfstaengl, Helene's husband, was to keep up his foreign connections and look after foreign relations.

To each of his other colleagues, he assigned a specific mission. He had scarcely signed the last paper when they heard cars stopping outside and police dogs howling. The young American ran to the flour barrel a second time and buried right at the bottom the documents which would allow National Socialism to continue on its course no matter what happened. Then, quite naturally, she went and opened the door.

Hitler had made no effort to get away. He stood waiting, quite impassive. The policemen halted. „Don't waste your time,” Hitler said to the officer of the state police. „I am ready.” Despite the bitter cold awaiting him outside, he refused a warm coat. He threw his trench coat over his shoulders as best he could, taking care only to take along his Iron Cross. His face was deathly pale when he went out into the torrential rain and gusting wind. At 10:00 at night, 65 kilometers away at Landsberg on the Lech, the heavy door of Cell No. Seven was closed after him.

Everything appeared, finally, to be lost.

All hope, however, was not dead.

The city of Munich had been stirred to intense feelings for Hitler after the failure of the putsch. There had been not the least sign of solidarity with Kahr and

Lossow and their people. In powerless rage, they had pounced on the movement that had made them tremble. Its offices had been closed, the *Völkischer Beobachter* banned and all its assets seized. But the harder they hit, the more indignation they aroused. „For some days,” writes Benoist-Méchin, „the people, prey to a strange agitation, have been roaming the streets singing patriotic songs and booing von Kahr.”

„The streets of the city,” adds historian Pierre Soisson, „resounded with enthusiastic cries of *Deutschland Erwache* [‘Germany Awake’] and ‘Heil Hitler’.”

A third French historian, Raymond Cartier, concludes: „Kahr, in 24 hours, has become the most unpopular man in Bavaria, and his continuance as state commissioner impossible.” The reaction in favor of Hitler was most lively, however, at the University of Munich, even though the National Socialist movement was principally a popular movement gathering up above all the little people and workers.

On the day after Hitler’s imprisonment, a referendum was organized at the university. Reproducing the official report of this opinion poll will tell it best: „Meeting at the university: 70 percent for Hitler, 20 percent von Kahr, 10 percent indifferent The only people listened to are those speaking in favor of Hitler; the others are booed.”

Even in many places outside of Bavaria there were demonstrations in favor of Hitler. He had not, therefore, lost everything. On the contrary, a mystique was in the process of being born.

Who knew whether Hitler, going to prison on that icy November day, may not just then have entered into the golden realm of legend?



Hitler revisits Landsberg Prison in 1924, where he had been kept for 264 days by the German Republic after leading an early armed revolt against communism in Bavaria, the so-called Beer Hall Putsch. Later, the Allied occupiers would continue to use the prison to commit crimes against the German people, executing scores of falsely convicted „war criminals“ here after 1945. This is an original Hoffmann photograph.

CHAPTER 31

HITLER GOES ON TRIAL FOR TREASON

If I should die, that would simply be an indication that my star has run its course, and that my mission has ended." – This was another apparently sibylline sentence linking Adolf Hitler to an esoteric world where powers that reign in the great beyond direct certain living beings.

Hitler expected to be shot. Charles de Gaulle, in identical circumstances, would certainly have put him against the wall. If the generals Salan, Challe and others were not killed by a firing squad after their failed Algerian putsch of April 23, 1961, it was not because the desire for it was lacking in the vindictive head of the French government. But Germany's President Ebert was just a saddler come up in the social scale; and Gustav Stresemann was overwhelmed by his repeated ministerial crises and by the goiter which hung from his neck like a boa.

All things considered, Stresemann rather agreed with Hitler. He heard the popular rumblings. Annihilated by the congenital weakness of the parliamentary democracy that had thrown him out of power three times in four months, he had understood clearly enough that the patriots of the south of his country had exploded.

„This insurrection," he said to the French ambassador at Berlin on Nov. 9, 1923, „would not have happened if Germany's successive governments, whatever their opinions, had not failed time and again."

He did not hesitate to tell the French diplomat that the invasion of the Ruhr had been one of the principal causes of the rebellion in his country: "The gravitation of the masses toward Communism or toward racism, which drew in not just intellectuals but many workers, had its origin in Germany's desperate situation."

This „racism," to what did it refer, if not Adolf Hitler's movement?

The writer Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, just like Stresemann, recognized the patriotic motives that had animated the rebels: „There are many things that can be said against Hitler. But one thing we shall always be able to say: He was a fanatic for Germany."

„He was." that sounds like a funeral oration.

The New York Times would go still further in the liquidation of Hitler. At the end

of the affair it would write these words: „The Munich putsch definitely eliminates Hitler and his National Socialist followers.“

Hitler thought it himself for some days. For him, as for every revolutionary, dying politically was worse than dying physically.

To everyone, his star appeared to be shattered in a thousand pieces.

Hitler gave way to despair. To live without a goal, his calling gone, interested him not at all. He went on a hunger strike. In a few days he had become emaciated and had lackluster eyes. For two weeks he refused to take any food.

It was two women above all who saved him from dying. One was the aged Frau Bechstein, who felt a love for him she camouflaged by her years. She passed herself off as his adoptive mother in order to see him. But it was Helene Hanfstaengl especially, the intrepid young American, with whom he had sought refuge on the evening of Nov. 9, who saved Hitler a second time.

Helene wrote him a stern and fervent letter, telling him again that he did not have the right to let down those who had fought so hard for him, above all the National Socialists who had been killed at his side at Munich. By giving up himself and abandoning them, he would be playing the game of his opponents.

A third woman as well, learning of Hitler's collapse in spirit, had hastened to the Landsberg prison. She was someone who more than anyone else had the right to talk to him: it was the widow of his friend Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, who was killed in the Residenzstrasse, and who, by throwing himself on Hitler and dying himself, had saved his life.

This heroic woman, instead of moaning, came to tell Hitler that he too had to rise above the misfortune, as she was determined to do, and that she was proud her husband had died for him.

This nobility in sorrow, this exhortation to take courage, completely overwhelmed Hitler. Not a single wife nor any mother had blamed him for the death of a husband or a son. They wrote to him or hastened to tell him that he must continue his fight.

„It is a duty demanded of me by our martyrs,“ he said, convinced at last „I shall perform it“.

That very evening he agreed to take a bowl of rice. Life for Hitler began again.

A fourth woman, Winifred Wagner, Richard Wagner's daughter-in-law, would also play an important role in his psychic comeback.

She wrote to him, too, and sent him a book of poetry in the inspired style of the master. She remained fiercely loyal.

„Believe me,“ she repeatedly said, „Hitler is on the road to power, and, like Sigfried, the predestined hero in *The Valkyrie*, he will pull the sword out of the German oak.“

For Hitler, Wagner was the sky, the stars, the immense forces of creation. Wagner's works permeated his whole being.

He had gone, as on a pilgrimage, to the villa Wahnfried in Bayreuth, where Cosima, Wagner's 86-year-old widow, was living. He had become an intimate of the entire family of the departed master. He often returned to Bayreuth, as to an enchanted lake. A few weeks before the putsch he had spent a day there again, dreaming almost shyly in the garden, in the library, in Wagner's music room, and had expounded with feeling on the dreams that stirred within him in great gusts like those that had given the *Meistersinger von Nürnberg* to the world.

Winifred's six-year-old daughter later told in a delightful way of these hours of Hitler's eloquence that she knew when she was little: „His voice took on tone and color and grew deeper and deeper until we sat like a circle of little charmed birds listening to the music although we didn't pay any attention to a word he said.“

The music of Hitler's vocal cords and the music of Wagner's scores harmonized with each other in a grandiose blending. Once he was in prison, Hitler received many tokens of Winifred's devotion, from wonderful letters with the written characters arranged like musical notes to earthly comforts such as plum tarts and supplies of paper and pencils.

His friends, too, were unceasing in their efforts to express their confidence in Hitler.

Echoes of popular demonstrations came to him from the outside. Christmas night of 1923 had been the occasion of manifestations in Munich revelatory of the most deep-seated feelings. Heinrich Hoffmann, the photographer, has recounted:

„That Christmas a group of Schwabing artists in the movement celebrated the holiday season in the Blute Cafe with a performance entitled *Hitler in Prison*. The curtain rose on a cell. Snowflakes were falling outside a small barred window. A man sat at a desk, face buried in his hands. And an invisible male chorus was singing

Silent Night. Then appeared an angel, who placed an illuminated Christmas tree on the table. Slowly the man turned and revealed his face. Many thought it was Hitler himself, and a half-sob went through the hall. When the lights went up, the photographers noticed that many men and women were hurriedly hiding their moist eyes with handkerchiefs."

It was then that Hitler sensed that his trial, instead of finishing him, could provide an opportunity totally beyond all expectations of transforming the dock into a formidable tribune.

From that moment, the Hitler who had been struck with dismay and near to taking his own life became once again a different man. Eloquence, his supreme power, that was stifled in his prison cell, was now at his will going to burst forth from the court of justice to all of Germany.

Until now he had never had so resounding a platform available to him. Accused, and fired up by the power of his art, he could pass from the role of accused to that of accuser and turn the courtroom into the biggest meeting hall of the Reich, before hundreds of special newspaper correspondents, and no longer facing five or six thousand people, but with all of Germany listening.

On Feb. 26, 1924, Hitler's trial got under way in Munich. It was also, indeed above all – at least until the eve of the trial – Ludendorff's trial.

The principal star of the putsch and the best known, but not much of a speaker, Ludendorff quickly got tangled up in his 42 pages of testimony, which proved a heavy assignment for the audience. At the end of a few hours, Hitler had put him in the shade.

Hitler arrived at Munich in fine fettle. The conclusion of the report of Dr. Brinsteiner, the prison physician, left Hitler's detractors few grounds for delusion: „Hitler is at all times in control of himself, and his will and his mental capacity are not impaired by any illness."

He was fit for service, as they say. For 27 days he was going to hold people breathless, in Germany and even abroad.

On the first day of the trial the pretty Little Swedish countess who had married Goering wrote, „Oh, my God, help him that all may end well."

„All Germany, if not the world," writes Toland, the American historian, „was watching Munich on the morning of Feb. 26."

„I choose, like Goethe, the hammer and not the anvil,” Hitler declared.

He entered the courtroom completely confident. Immediately, like a perceptive strategist, instead of bracing himself to make a defense, he went on the attack. He took full responsibility for the putsch. Proudly, according to some reporters. Boastfully, according to others. But there was no question with him of pleading extenuating circumstances or making a bid for commiseration. He had not been a rebel, but a defender of the honor and the unity of the Reich.

„Everyone,” he cried, „raises his hand to swear that he did not know about anything, that he had no plan, that he didn’t mean to do anything. They don’t have the courage to assume responsibility for their actions, to stand before the judges and proclaim, yes, that is just what we wanted. We wanted to overthrow the government”

He was proclaiming it in a voice of thunder: „I consider myself the best of Germans. The people have been betrayed. Many a time the Berlin government has compelled an entire victorious army to bend the knee and lay down its arms in order to offer up the ancient territory of the Reich as a pasture for the Jews and international bankers. The people are exploited. All the nations of the world have pounced on them like a flock of rapacious ravens, with the abetment of those who profess to be the government of the Reich.”

Thus Hitler was taking a bold and aggressive stance such as the public likes. Some of his statements were debatable. For all it continued to hold out heroically at the end of the autumn of 1918, was the German army still indisputably the strongest at that time? Had not Ludendorff himself, Hitler’s companion in the dock, advised the government by telegraph to seek a compromise and to be open to peace negotiations?

But the phrase „dagger thrust in the back” had struck home. Hitler, the avenger, made it resound in the courtroom. The audience listened transfixed. They even burst into cheers.

„But he’s a colossal fellow, this Hitler,” one of the judges had murmured under his breath, but not so low that it was not heard by the press correspondents.

„How,” the accused went on, „how can I be treated as a criminal when my mission is to lead Germany back to its proper position of honor in the world?” He presented himself as a messenger of destiny. Not as the leader who denies his actions but as one proud of what he has done.

On the second day it was the turn at the bar of Kahr, Lossow and Seisser, the men who – like Hitler and before Hitler – had meant to carry out a *coup d’état* against

Berlin, but at the same time also against the unity of the Reich. Their *coup d'état* got under way, it will be remembered, when von Kahr, on Sept 26, 1923, had rebelled against the constitution, and when Gen. von Lossow a few days later had taken a similar action against the commander-in-chief of the Reichswelir.

On the night of Nov. 8, seeing themselves beaten to the punch by Hitler's bold coup, they had rallied in support of the putsch, giving Hitler the accolade before 3,000 witnesses.

Two hours later they had gone back on their word, deceiving Ludendorff and attempting to climb back on their perch, only to go down themselves, rejected by everyone, a few days after the failure of the putsch.

Doubly traitors – to both Germany and to Ludendorff – they pretended before the court to be innocent victims of a kind of terrorism. Of their own *coup d'état*, which had been in full swing for several weeks, they breathed not a word. It was strictly a matter of this miserable Hitler who, using threats, had involved them in his crazy enterprise. They themselves had done nothing but „put on an act.“ A pretty strange act, with von Lossow clicking his heels before Ludendorff and von Kahr fraternizing with Hitler on the platform of the beer garden.

„A moment of national greatness,“ Gen. Ludendorff had exclaimed in their midst.

And now that they were driven to explain their behavior, the runaways of the historic night of Nov. 9, 1923 tried to pass themselves off as just small fry who had only yielded to force.

They contradicted themselves before the court when von Lossow described Hitler – who had so easily involved them – as „being of limited intelligence and mediocre in any case.“

„Mr. President,“ Hitler asked, „what weight can be given to the testimony of a German officer who has gone back on his word of honor?“

Lossow: „I was threatened with a revolver.“

Hitler. „What must we think of a German general whom a mere revolver can subdue?“

Von Lossow withdrew, defeated. He felt terribly ill-used.

Judge Neithardt thought it necessary to be indignant at the thrashing Hitler had

just administered: „Your behavior is a personal insult.“

Hitler, smiling: „I accept the reprimand.“

The judge had felt obliged at every turn to call for silence in the courtroom, which was applauding Hitler much too vociferously.

Soisson, the historian, described the atmosphere of the court as follows: „In the courtroom, he is virtually the one conducting the trial. He interrupts the judges, launches into vehement diatribes, accuses, refutes. The courtroom is hanging on his every word.“

Great Britain’s foremost journalist, Ward Price, who attended the trial, wrote: „Every syllable burst forth sharply, and when Hitler raised his imperious voice, the little judge, president of the court, was so frightened in the middle of the bench that his white wig trembled until he had to hold onto it with his hand to keep it still.“

The major newspapers, reluctantly to be sure, gave Hitler’s harangues an interest and excitement that day by day increased.

Newspaper headlines reproduced Hitler’s words in all of Germany – a fantastic public forum. Before the putsch, Hitler was known only to some of the Bavarians. Now all of Germany, down to the last village, devoured the reports of a hundred daily papers and kept their ears glued to their radios.

Newspapers throughout Germany devoted columns to him. The name of Hitler came out of the shadows, became stored in memories, grew to encompass the nation. The attempted *coup d’état*, which was ridiculed outside of Germany by calling it the „beer hall putsch,“ was seen in a different light.

Thus, even beyond the borders of the Reich, Hitler was becoming a person of importance. What would it not have been if television had existed then?

In any case, in the endeavor to destroy Hitler, he had just been made known to tens of millions of Germans and foreigners. The star was launched.

What was going on in the minds of the judges at the center of this hurricane of eloquence? We may be certain that pressures were built up – against Hitler and perhaps also in his favor.

Hitler had followers even in judicial circles. The Bavarian Minister of Justice Gessler, future minister of justice of the Third Reich, probably endeavored to influence some members of the tribunal and of the jury. But other Bavarian ministers

no doubt acted in a contrary direction. On March 4, 1924 the Bavarian Council of Ministers took it upon themselves, despite the doctrine of the separation of powers, to criticize Judge Neithardt while the trial was at its height.

Three Cabinet ministers furiously rebuked the court; a fourth minister even boasted of having „personally censured the chief justice of the tribunal for having permitted Hitler to speak for four hours consecutively.”

„It is impossible to keep Hitler from talking,” replied the hapless judge, at a loss, his robe damp from so much eloquence.

The position of the court was all the more delicate because some very important people in Berlin had even all but stated that the accused were in the right.

On the very day of the putsch, Stresemann was head of the Berlin government Hitler specifically meant to liquidate. But this same Stresemann, while the trial was still going on, wrote in the newspaper *Zeit* these lines almost of absolution: „The Munich trial will one day be of great importance for the historian. It will depict better than any other document the anguish of the German soul the men who are appealing before the court of law down there certainly believe they have had the good of the nation and the Reich at heart”.

He added: „In all these national movements, there is much that is good, that is truly German. That the young people in their exaltation think like Hitler and Ludendorff is understandable.” Stresemann was sorry about it, but he understood.

The judges at Munich felt they were in over their heads. They were receiving threatening letters from students. The three jurors, who with the three magistrates made up the court of justice, were not very cooperative, it was plain to see. They even had an air of rejoicing on hearing Hitler’s sallies.

The court had no choice but to exercise forbearance and try to cut its losses.

When it came time for the chief prosecutor to pronounce his indictment, he went so far as to compliment Hitler on his unique eloquence and on his personal and public life.

„He has always,” the magistrate stated, „led a spotless private life, and in view of the solicitations to which he was naturally subject as an often honored party leader, that merits special emphasis.”

He continued: „Hitler is a highly gifted man who, from modest beginnings, has achieved by his seriousness and relentless labors a respected position in public life.

He has unstintingly sacrificed himself for the ideas he believes in, and he has amply fulfilled his duty as a soldier. He cannot be blamed for taking advantage of the situation which has come about" the chief prosecutor all but requested the Cross of Merit for Hitler. Such being his frame of mind, Hitler no longer had any motive for being modest. His accuser himself proclaimed that he had exceptional gifts. His duty was to make use of them.

He had never conceived of his mission in any light other than in the capacity of leader of the people.

At the time of the Munich trial, when he was just the defeated putschist of Nov. 9, his faith remained unshaken.

He proclaimed it in open court without regard for those who sneered: „The man who feels called upon to govern a people has no right to say: If you want me or summon me, I shall come. No, his duty orders him to assert himself.“

Hitler hammered out his words: „From the very beginning I aimed a thousand times higher than obtaining a Cabinet post I consider it unworthy of a great man to wish to pass into posterity merely by becoming a minister. I have aimed at becoming the destroyer of Marxism. I am going to accomplish that task, and then, for me, the title of minister will be an absurdity.“

Joachim Fest, the German journalist-historian, could not hide his amazement.

The assurance with which he passed himself off as a great man and defended his point of view as if it were a matter of course, the tone in which he exalted his own person did not fail to make a big impression straight off and to make him the cynosure of the trial.

A mere provincial putsch provoked in Bavaria by an autonomist secession, and before you knew it he had hoisted himself up to the highest national level. Any German whosoever could read his remarks: He hadn't fought in Munich just to ward off a separatist threat, but to replace Marxism with the great national and social revolution that would reconcile the classes and reestablish the greatness of the nation.

The intuitive and provocative assurance with which Hitler faced the trial must be credited as being among his most impressive political successes. It was his own personal gifts that transformed the fiasco of the putsch into a triumph.

Nobody ever before had the arrogance when beaten and in prison thus to present himself as the future builder of a new world.

Hitler, someone quite other than a Ludendorff now put in the shade, or a Lossow who took a flogging in the course of his deposition, even dared to appeal directly to the army, the army that had not fired on the putschists and which, he exclaimed, would one day form a bloc with the National Socialist.

„I am convinced that the hour will come when the masses who today gather around our swastika banner in the street will unite with those who fired upon them. When I learned that it was the municipal police that fired on us, I felt happy that it was not the Reichswehr that had thus demeaned itself. The Reichswehr remains as free of any pollution, as spotless as before. One day it will stand wholly at our side, officers and men alike.“

An ever-growing crowd – thousands of persons – occupied the square before the court house. On the day of the sentence, the first of April, 1924, women scattered flowers about the courtroom in such quantities that it was necessary to order the ushers to take them away.

The cell Hitler occupied at Munich during the trial became a „pastry shop.“

The frenzy was such that young women asked for the favor of slipping into the prisoner's bathtub. It was with great difficulty that this wave of would-be bathers was turned away.

To be sure, these young women were delirious. But would there have been at that same moment a single German woman in the entire Reich requesting permission to stretch out in Herr Ebert's bathtub, or in Herr Stresemann's?

There was never another statesman in the world who had, as Hitler did, millions of fanatical female admirers. The mob is a woman, and Hitler had captured it as one captures a woman.

Hitler had the last word. Whatever opinion his opponents may hold of him nearly a century afterward, his peroration will remain one of the most famous pages in the book of German eloquence.

Without raising his voice and almost without gestures, he spoke, beyond his judges, to the future and to history:

The army we have formed grows larger from day to day. I have the proud hope that one day the hour will come when these rough companies will become battalions, when these battalions will become regiments and the regiments divisions; when the old cockade will be lifted up from the mire where it now lies; when the old flags will wave again; when a reconciliation will be born at

the great last judgment we are prepared to face. For it is not you, gentlemen, who judge us; it is the eternal court of history that will pronounce our sentence. I know what yours will be. But the court of which I speak will not ask us: have you committed an act of high treason or not? That court will judge us, the quartermaster general of the old army and us, his officers and soldiers, as Germans who have wished only to fight and die.

You are welcome to declare us a thousand times guilty. The goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear in little pieces the indictment of your public prosecutor as well as the judgment which you will pronounce. For she will acquit us.

It was a feat of enormous self-assurance. Hitler's army before Dec. 9, 1923 comprised around 60,000 supporters. How many were left in April 1924? But Hitler was a soothsayer. He saw in the distance the legions on the march; he could already hear the tramp of their feet.

Shortly thereafter, sentence was passed.

First of all, the court set aside the request for extradition that would be a threat to Hitler at various times right up to 1932. „It is unthinkable,” the court decided, „that a soldier who has fought so bravely for Germany should be deported.“

As for the penalties inflicted, they were relatively light and came near to not being pronounced at all. The jury had flatly refused to render a verdict of guilty. To get them to accept a sentence – a very small one in such a case – it was necessary to promise them that a remission of the sentence would be granted after a very brief term which they fixed themselves at six months. Ludendorff was acquitted and was rather displeased by it. He had done at least as much as the National Socialists who had been lulled just a few feet from him on Nov. 9, 1923. It looked as if they were doing him a favor in acquitting him.

Hitler, like his principal companions, received a sentence of five years, years he knew would not all have three hundred and sixty-five days. As for the crowds, the people, they were celebrating. So much so that Hitler had to make an appearance at a window of the courthouse. Never before in the history of the world had one seen the like: a condemned man, in the presence of his judges and his guards, goes over to a window, opens it, salutes the crowd that is cheering him and waving flowers.

„Once again,” Fest wrote laconically, „the government had lost the match.“

This victory included a threefold lesson.

First, Hitler had comprehended that more than force was needed to gain

mastery of the state.

Second, he could attain power only through the support of the people, after he had convinced them and brought them into the fold, and while respecting the existing laws. That would take time – perhaps, he said then, as much as 10 years.

Third, a new government was not put together on the spur of the moment. It was necessary first of all to form cadres, to have worthy men available who were highly trained for their future mission.

Hitler would soon bless the failure that had allowed him to reach each and every citizen of his future Reich through the gigantic and un hoped for publicity of the trial. And he would bless equally the lessons that the experience had taught him.

„I thank the fate that denied us victory in 1923. How would we have gone about setting up the new government? There were not enough of us, and we were not experienced enough. I'd have been forced once again to rely on the bourgeoisie. That would have ended in a heartrending failure. Instead of remaking the Reich, we'd have been limited to changing its trade name,“ Hitler said.

„The unsuccessful putsch was a great good fortune for us,“ he added.

Fest, the least amiable of historians, would have to admit it: „Hitler had been assured of a preponderant role thanks to the defeat. The 9th of November was the day of the breakthrough.“

Imprisonment was also going to give Hitler an entire year of providential meditation that he would never otherwise have had.

„During my imprisonment I had the time to provide my philosophy with a natural, historical foundation.

„The authorities had made a mistake by imprisoning me. They would have been far wiser to let me make speeches all the time, without giving me time to breathe.“



Adolf Hitler leaves Landsberg Prison on Dec. 20, 1924, after serving 264 days of a five- year sentence. Though convicted of „treason“ for his efforts to defend the Bavarian state against communism, his sentence was commuted by National Socialist supporters in the German government who recognized that Hitler’s actions had been motivated by the highest of ideals.

Thanks to them, Hitler would be able calmly to formulate his beliefs in *Mein Kampf* and prepare his future strategy.

He had renounced forever *coups d’état* by force in the manner of a Scheidemann, Liebknecht or Kapp. Henceforth he would stick rigorously to the democratic reality, basing all power on the consent of the people.

That consent could just as readily be granted by the voters to an authoritarian democracy, which was his choice, as to a parliamentary democracy: He had seen the latter’s harmful effects and meant to relieve the German people of that form of government.

It was a truly and rationally democratic Hitler who walked out of the Munich courthouse on April 1, 1924.



Millions of Germans turned out to protest against the Treaty of Versailles after it was learned that the leaders of the newly elected socialist-leaning government had betrayed them to their paymasters in the capitalist West and the newly formed Soviet state in Russia. The surrender of Germany during World War I was largely the result of communist agitation behind the German lines: agitation led by the Bolsheviks. Ironically, one of the reasons the Bolsheviks rose to power was due to German intelligence efforts and the defeat of the czar's forces in World War I.

CHAPTER 32

THE TRAPSETTERS OF GENEVA

For years Germany had gone from one deferred payment date to the next like a businessman being hounded by his creditors. She was foundering under the political and financial injunctions of a slave treaty worse even than the treatment accorded the tribes of Africa in the preceding century. Thirteen years after the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was still dragging her convict's ball and chain. The tribunal of the victors had been moved from the Versailles Palace of Vengeance to Geneva, a Calvinist watering place as cold as the fish in its lake.

The „justices“ were seated there in a large and quite ordinary building that was constructed for them at great cost; the Palace of the League of Nations. The League of Nations was a sort of clamorous and colorful lay council where hundreds of representatives of presumably civilized countries met in grand array for a few months each year, for the purpose, theoretically, of deciding the great problems of the world, but devoting themselves in fact to unrestrained agitation about a dying issue.

For a long time Germany had not been able to participate in these conclaves. She was the black sheep. Her presence had been tolerated only since 1927, after an eight-year period of ruthless sterilization. Thereafter she sent representatives to Geneva, who were not as well treated as the men who delivered coal to the building or swept its stairs. A whole sterile world had its existence within the league, a world where all were engaged in a feverish whirl of fruitless activity, doomed inevitably to fail. The delegates were of all kinds. Sly old politicians surrounded by loquacious Egerias who had been somebody in the theater half a century earlier and aspired once again to cut a figure, this time offstage, with their moth-eaten and heavily painted charms; diplomats grown gray in the ambassadorial service, experts in boring people to death and without equal in setting traps; oriental princes recently promoted, all a gleam with trickery, and leading a grand retinue of attendants at the expense of the intelligence service, which traded its banknotes for their oil; Hondurans, Costa Ricans, West Indians, both gloomy and boisterous; and Ethiopians with a strong odor of anthropophagy about them. Altogether, they gave this congress the aspect of a very costly zoological garden where the animals were singularly lacking in beauty.

It was to them, however, that the Treaty of Versailles had assigned the role of dictating to the world. It had soon revealed itself to be incapable and powerless in every respect. Yet it was the league which had been supposed to regulate the return

to international life of a German state that had been given lavish promises that it would enjoy full and equal rights. Germany would be treated with the same consideration, for example, as that given the government of Haiti, which constituted immense progress; for her recognition had been put off year after year, just as the establishment of the general disarmament which recognition implied had been postponed. And this willfully sterile assembly would still be engaged in the same deafening cock-a-doodle-doo and muddleheaded jabber when, on Jan. 30, 1933, the new Chancellor of the Reich, Hitler, rose on the political horizon, a new and unknown force to be reckoned with.

There had been a brief period of waiting since his accession to power. First of all, Hitler had been engaged, at a gigantic cost in effort, in rebuilding Germany's economy, in putting 2,600,000 men back to work in 1933 and giving them renewed pride in living. Meanwhile, the sentiments occupying Germany's neighbors were divided between envy and apprehension. Up to that point, everyone outside the Reich had treated Germany like a frayed doormat. She had been dismembered. Tens of thousands of square kilometers of her territory had been taken from her. Ten million Germans of formerly Germanic lands had been put under foreign rule, despite all the pledges of „a free choice of the people” made on Nov. 11, 1918 in the signed armistice.



Reich President Hindenburg is here seen leading a procession in which he is to announce the appointment of Adolf Hitler as Reich Chancellor. Hitler officially took power in this office on Jan. 30, 1933, though he continued to share the government with Hindenburg until August 1934.

The Saar had been reduced to the status of a Western colony. The soil of the Reich had been occupied beyond the Rhine; control of her rivers and ports had been seized; her railroads and her national bank had been mortgaged; and her entire territory had been put under the thumb of 1,800 Allied military inspectors. An utterly impossible tribute had been imposed on her for a period extending two-thirds of a

century. Any possibility she might have had for trade had been destroyed by enormous taxes on her exports. And she was jumped on at the slightest breach. On three occasions punitive expeditions had been sent into Germany. In January of 1923, over a simple matter of an incomplete delivery of telegraph poles, the French troops of Raymond Poincaré had invaded the Ruhr, stripped the region of its entire stock of coal, brutally put down worker protests and brought the entire Reich to a monetary collapse. Despite all that, demands on Germany for intolerable indemnity payments continued.

To meet them, Germany had taken out one foreign loan after another, leading ultimately, after the worldwide crash of 1929, to financial catastrophe, a 50 percent decrease in her industrial activity, and a suffocating increase in unemployment. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles, a treaty of rapine and a treaty of vengeance, had thus for nearly 15 years kept a proud and industrious people – and in population, the first in all of Europe – in a state of servitude and near annihilation.

When it was already too late, the embarrassed experts had tried to mollify Germany with the application of soothing plasters in the form of the Dawes and Young plans, which did slightly reduce the fantastic burden placed on Germany's back but extended it for more than a half-century. In 1987, the distant descendants of the defeated combatants of 1918 would still have to empty their pockets to fill the coffers of nations that were not only rolling in wealth but hogging the colonial resources of a third of the world besides. Germany was strangling. The politicians of the Weimar Republic had protested over and over again at this treatment. But always in vain. Their status as temporary electees, as temporary ministers, as deputies bounced by partisan struggles from one crisis to another (a new „democratic“ government in Germany every eight months) had eliminated any chance they might have had for continuity, for effectiveness in resisting the injunctions from abroad. Some, like Stresemann, had fought courageously to render the victors less unreasonable, but after 12 years of futile effort, Germany's situation was still miserable. In fact, it had grown worse from one year to the next.

It was only just barely that Germany had managed, at the London Conference in 1931, to obtain the consent of the Allies for their evacuation of the Rhine provinces after 12 years of harsh military occupation. And those provinces, moreover, had several times narrowly escaped being separated from the rest of Germany following autonomist intrigues pursued by the French secret service and heavily subsidized by the French government. In January of 1933, that is to say after 14 years, the League of Nations in Geneva had still never even seriously addressed the essential point of Germany's case: the implementation of world disarmament. Yet the Treaty of Versailles had formally established that once Germany had been disarmed, all the other countries would in turn automatically disarm. The pledge had been a categorical one, signed by every one of the victors in 1919.

Ever since 1927 the Allied Military Commission, omnipresent in Germany and finicky in the extreme, had officially recognized that Germany had been completely disarmed. The head of the commission, the French Gen. Nollet, had so signified in writing. The time had therefore come for the other countries to disarm in their turn, assuming their word and signature had any value.

As would be seen, they didn't have. For six long years, from 1927 to 1933, the Europe of Geneva waltzed through an endless succession of swindles, since none of the victors had any intention of discussing either the size of their armies or their arsenals. For them it was not a question of disarming, but of taking part in the make-believe of disarmament. In 1927, when it was quite evident that Germany had disarmed, the League of Nations contented itself with forming a „Preparatory Disarmament Committee.“

A committee has always and everywhere been a hypocritical way of avoiding difficulties while buying time. The committee in question had accordingly spent five years dozing and sitting on its hands. From time to time it had stirred, pronounced a few sententious words, then quickly gone back to sleep. By the fall of 1932, thanks to this prolonged sabotage, the „Preparatory Disarmament Committee“ had gotten absolutely nowhere; had prepared only a vague and totally useless negotiation plan. In the meantime six years had been frittered away.

That was what the dummy committee had intended. And obtained.

In 1932, however, in the League of Nations, it was high time they kept their word. Exasperated by the coldly deliberate disregard by the Allied Powers of their solemn commitments, Germany was leaning more and more toward Hitlerian solutions. Hitler was making it loud and clear that once in power he would break the chains of Versailles, and already millions of his compatriots were applauding him and following him. If they wished to keep Hitler from reaching the chancellery, it was essential that they provide, and as soon as possible, some visible success or other to strengthen Germany's „democratic“ regime, which was reeling and ready to collapse. And the success of any such rescue operation could alone be ensured by a definitive and public recognition of the famous „equal rights“ that had already been agreed to in form to the German government, but never conceded in fact.

The equality would become effective only with the realization of a general suppression of armaments worldwide, as the Treaty of Versailles had ordered. To continue quibbling about that was to consign the Weimar „democracy“ to destruction and to open wide to Hitler the door to power after having permanently discredited his opponents. Now it would be seen whether some minimum of „democratic“ solidarity actually existed, or whether the oft-trumpeted principle of equality was merely a farce.

After so many years wasted in mealy-mouthed hypocrisies, the Disarmament Conference met with this end in view on Feb. 2, 1932 in Geneva.

The chairman of the conference, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Henderson, was perhaps the only European fully aware of the imminence of collapse of the „German democracy“ if the sabotage of the disarmament continued much longer. „I refuse to accept for a single instant that this conference might fail,“ he exclaimed to the 250 delegates, „because its failure would have consequences too terrible to contemplate.“ Henderson „refused to accept,“ but soon he would have to accept.

From the first day, it was evident that they intended to take no action. The preliminary plan of the disarmament convention was not even introduced for discussion by the assembly. Sixty-two countries were represented, making up a mixed medley of the most disparate, nay, the most opposite interests. Each one had his own particular armaments to protect: the British, their ships; the French, their Maginot Line, along, armed concrete barrier they had been building on their eastern border since 1926 at the cost of billions, right under the noses of the disarmed Germans. That was how they had „disarmed.“ Anyone who tried to untangle that skein of egoism was sure to run into the stubborn opposition of each of the competitors. Not to act was becoming an obligation on the part of the league. Then, too, someone hastened to declare that the experts – who had taken five years to bring forth just a few paragraphs, and those at once judged dangerous – were irresponsible specialists, and that the 250 delegates of the 62 countries were the only ones truly able to act responsibly.

Instead of making a decision, the assembly decided to start again from the beginning. The „provisory committee“ declared that notions had changed with regard to armaments. Airplanes flew higher than formerly. Bombs were more deadly. Tanks advanced more rapidly. They now fired twice as fast. It was important, therefore, to examine these new modifications with the greatest care – a new waste of time guaranteed. In order to entangle still further any discussion, the assembly decided to create a series of „committees“ with partial aims.

So no conclusion could be reached by any of them, and the whole thing would be brought back again for consideration. This interweaving of negotiations could have no other effect than to turn the disarmament problem into an inextricable thicket. Maximum fragmentation was the order of the day. A „Chemical Arms Committee“ was formed where discussion of the noxious effects of such weapons was bound to be prolonged indefinitely. There was a „Manpower Committee,“ open to endless disputes about national contingents and colonial contingents; a „Morals Committee“; a „General Committee“; a „Political Committee“; a „Land Committee“; an „Air Committee“; a „Naval Committee“; an „Expenditures Committee“; a „Committee of Jurists“; and even – this was the crowning touch – an „Artistic

Committee" that would surely go back to Léonardo da Vinci to study his early sketches of types of cannons and airplanes. These multiple committees were of course amply provided with subcommittees.

And hundreds of delegates were thus assured of having juicy jobs in Geneva for a long time to come. Except that the Geneva soft jobs factory was sure to collapse on that many soft job seekers. Benoist-Méchin, the French historian, shocked at so much fruitless commotion, declared that it could have served as the scenario of a comedy by Moliere. After the discussion was all over, he added: „Now, when I follow the work of the conference itself, my desire to laugh goes away. My heart sinks when I leaf through the file documents one after another, because the specter of war rises ever more clearly out of this enormous pile of projects and contradictory statements. There will be a tragedy at the end of this farce, because there is always a tragedy at the end of human stupidity." (Benoist Mecliin, *Histoire de l'Armee allemande*, Vol. III, p. 123). Stupidity said it all. There was a conviction among the ranks of the former allies that anything and everything was allowed, that Germany would swallow down each succeeding platter of snakes as if it were sauerkraut.

In that decisive year of 1932 the principal partners were not yet even able to say – or did not wish to say – just what a general disarmament, to their minds, would have to consist of. „Equalization of forces at the lowest level," the Italians proposed.

„Proportional reduction," the Norwegians replied.

„Contingent on the principles of security," added the Americans.

„Bearing on which weapons?" the French wanted to know.

„In any case and above all not on the fleet," answered the British, who were very determined not to reduce their fleet, the most powerful in the world, by so much as a rowboat.

It was unbelievable, but that's the way it was.

It was thus quite evident that no one in Geneva dared come to the point. They preferred interminable discussions of mortar calibers and cruiser tonnages, shunting aside any discussion of the essential problem. From the second of February to the 22nd of April of 1932 – that is to say, only nine months before Hitler's triumph – they had taken not a single step forward. The League of Nations had fallen back on a resolution according to which the delegates of the 62 nations left it to the „competent committees" to „decide which weapons were the most specifically offensive weapons." (Resolution of the „General Committee" of April 22, 1932). Easter was approaching. What a relief. Everybody dropped his documents and went on vacation. The Germans were made to drag on through one quibble after another.

Once again they had been trapped and swindled.

After their vacations, the hundreds of petty bigwigs of the League had turned up in Geneva again, dallying and bustling about, flanked by their retinues of skirt-swishing secretaries who were decidedly more interested in the little gifts and exquisite dinners provided by their elderly employers than in the keyboards of their typewriters. Geneva had come alive and was swarming again. „Tangled and irksome proceedings pursued in an atmosphere of anything but sincerity,“ Minister Tardieu, one of the principal French „negotiators,“ was to remember. The Italian, Grandi, one of the rare level-headed delegates to the conference, proclaimed: „Armaments either represent a threat to peace and do so for all the states; or else they pose no threat of war and hence threaten no one. In which case there is nothing for it but to dissolve the conference.”

And, indeed, since its uselessness became every day more glaringly apparent, preparations were being made to dissolve it. It was then, when they were about to raise the aspergillum to solemnize the interment, that a staunch American intervened.

CHAPTER 33

AN AMERICAN AT THE 1932 GENEVA CONFERENCE

People in the United States are realists. They don't take months deciding what to do about a hair floating in the soup. President Herbert Hoover, upon reading the stack of reports from his delegate, had realized quite clearly that no decision was ever going to come out of all that empty chatter in Geneva. General disarmament was, would be, and would forever remain an embryo and die before it was born. Waste still more time? Since any kind of global accord was a chimera, why not bring the discussion back to basic principles, linked to something achievable? Any statesman would have reasoned the same way. It is better to save what you can than see everything go down the drain.

With the good sense and psychology of the average American, who is direct in business matters and knows how to extract the possible from the impossible, Hoover scribbled a dozen lines that his delegate would have to read from the rostrum of the Disarmament Conference, following innumerable reports droned out uselessly in Geneva by the hundreds of specialists in calculated tergiversation.

The text of the president of the United States was clear and precise as patrol orders for a mission. Mr. Hoover proposed that they climb down out of the clouds back to earth and confine themselves to a few resolutions he thought acceptable to everyone. Mr. Gibbons took only three minutes to read the proposals of his government to the Geneva denizens of cloud-cuckoo-land, who were apparently disposed to admire, but determined in advance to agree to nothing. This was the Hoover plan:

1. *In re* ground forces: reduction in numbers by one-third, with each nation entitled in addition to a police force proportional to the average allowed to Germany by the peace treaties. Total elimination of assault tanks and heavy artillery.

2. *In re* naval forces: elimination of one-third of the tonnage and number of battleships; of one-fourth of the tonnage in aircraft carriers, cruisers and destroyers; and of one-third of the tonnage in submarines. Extension of the Treaty of London to the French and Italian naval forces.

3. *In re* air forces: elimination of all bombers and prohibition of all aerial bombardment.

The Americans were meritorious in proposing measures that were bound to hit

themselves very hard as well. Mr. Gibbons courteously pointed that out when he had finished reading the proposals: „I must emphasize how great a sacrifice my country would be agreeing to if this plan were adopted, because it would oblige us to destroy more than 300,000 tons of shipping, more than 1,000 pieces of heavy artillery, 900 tanks, and 300 bombers.“

Now, suddenly, they were all driven into a corner. If they did not accept even partial reductions in armaments, how could the public be brought to believe that the assembly would ever agree to a general disarmament? It would soon be eight years of promising it every session while proceeding from loophole to loophole. Had the Geneva delegates merely intended to gain some time? To lead the public astray? To make a mockery of the equal rights they had formally acknowledged to the German people? That's what the public would believe if they walked out now.

The ordeal by fire was at hand. Who would approach the glowing coals? Germany, who might have waited for the Allies to put their cards on the table, voted her approval immediately. Italy did the same. England assumed the face of a sibyl. She did not dare admit that the idea of having to eliminate a third of her fleet filled her with horror. Not a third, not a single ton. But then, why for so many years had Great Britain gravely participated in a conference that had theoretically been assigned the mission of cutting back all navies, not just by one third but by three thirds? France had still less desire to acquiesce. As far as she was concerned, there was no question, not for a single moment, of acceding to any disarmament whatsoever, and no matter how partial.

The French are naturally clever with words. To go headlong against President Hoover's proposal was fraught with risk. France, though rich as Croesus, owed tons of gold to the United States. It was a matter therefore of saying a „yes“ that would in reality be a „no.“ Every Frenchman is a dazzling master in that sort of exercise. When he smothers you, it is with flowers. The French delegate thus eloquently praised „the seductive simplicity“ of the Hoover plan, but, he added sorrowfully, „the problems were complex; the proposals could not be accepted in their entirety; a few minor corrections would no doubt be necessary...; moreover, the armament reductions must continue to be tied in with the international security organization. ...“ „It was a polished demurrer,“ French historian Benoist-Mechin concluded, „with all the customary precautions.“ (*Op. cit.*, p. 329).

The argument of „international security“ was worth precisely nothing. We may well wonder how the armament of the Reich at that time could possibly have disturbed international security. Germany no longer had more than a handful of soldiers, no air force, and no tanks of any kind. On the other hand, the military depots of other countries, beginning with France, were crammed with weapons of terrible power. They alone, if seized by the desire for domination, could endanger

international security. That had been clearly seen when in 1923, in opposition to the wishes of the English, Poincaré had launched his divisions into the Ruhr. If Germany had reacted to that invasion, instead of subsiding into passive resistance, Europe might have seen war and bloodshed a second time. The problem of international security in 1932 thus in no way hinged on any excessive military force of the Germans, but solely on the armaments of the principal allies, the only ones sitting on thousands of heavy cannon and assault tanks.

The man of all work for the French after 1918, in fact their principal agent in Central Europe – and an agent of the Soviets as well – the Czechoslovak, Edouard Benes, set to work to wear down the Americans, who were such pests. While giving the appearance of rapturously accepting Mr. Hoover's marvelous plan, the Czech took great pains to render it nonsense as quickly as possible. In the resolution which he submitted to a vote of the assembly, the proposal to reduce land forces, battleships and submarines by a third; cruisers, destroyers and aircraft carriers by a fourth; and to eliminate tanks, heavy artillery and bombers altogether, was reduced by Benes to the very vague proposal of a „substantial reduction“ that would have to be implemented „by a general convention.“ When, where and how, God alone knew. The proposal was no longer a decision to be made, as requested by Mr. Hoover, but „a goal to attain....“

A goal which, according to the text itself, was completely problematical. It was further specified in an „appended statement“ that this response of the conference, obscure and dilatory as it was, was not binding in any way and was considered „without prejudice to any later position of the conference.“ In short, they agreed to nothing and proposed nothing, and even that nothing could still be annulled by any „later position“ taken by the conference.

The Soviet delegate, M. Litvinov, on July 21, 1932, had these splendidly cynical comments to offer. „Although the resolution begins by affirming that the hour has come for all nations to adopt substantial and far-reaching measures with an eye to disarmament and the consolidation of world peace, what follows in the text is the absolute negation of that affirmation. It seems, on the contrary, to constitute a recognition of the fact that the states represented at the conference did not consider the time had come to adopt a single decisive measure with an eye to disarmament“ (Statement of M. Litvinov, July 21, 1932). „The effort has been in vain,“ declared the Italian delegate on that same July 21, 1932. „In any case it has been absolutely inadequate by comparison with the wishes and hopes of the world.“

The American, Gibbons, found it deplorable. It remained for the German delegate, Nadolny, to draw the conclusion of this modem comedy: „For months the peoples of the world have followed the odd spectacle of these labors with great astonishment. They have seen a multitude of proposals, suggestions and complicated

discussions pass before them without perceiving the slightest tangible result. Under these circumstances, we find it impossible to accept the resolution submitted to us.”

Germany consequently made known her decision to the assembly. „My government,” Nadolny solemnly declared, „must point out that from this day on it cannot pledge its continued collaboration unless a satisfactory solution of this matter, decisive for Germany, is reached before the work of the conference is resumed.”

There it was. Either the 61 other countries would put an end to their interminable obstructionism, or Germany, the eternal „second-rate nation,” would not return to Geneva. Their bags packed, the Germans left for the Berlin train. The others looked at each other and smiled. Those dull-witted Teutons wouldn’t be any firmer than before. Their ill humor would melt away during the summer like sugar.

Why worry about it? Joyously as always, with wives and pseudo-wives tucked into the limousines, they scattered for their summer vacations.

The sky nevertheless was no longer cloudless. In the east, Germany no longer looked willing to bear whatever she was given. Adolf Hitler was shaking up the successive governments of the Reich, all specialists in capitulation, with a vigor that was increasing by the day. And by the summer of 1932, those governments were starting to be fearful. Was this young Adolf Hitler really going to sweep them away like so much vermin? On the 10th of the preceding April, facing Marshal Hindenburg, the toughest possible opponent, he had gained 2 million new votes. With his 13,418,051 votes, he already represented 36.8 percent of the German electorate. On the very eve of Benes’s trick proposal, Hitler had won 230 deputy seats in the legislative elections despite multiple acts of sabotage by the old regime, that now had its back to the wall.

The National Socialist Party had become by far the most important party in the Reich – larger than the socialist and Communist parties combined – and four times as strong as the Centrum that had formerly been so powerful. It was quite apparent that the minister of foreign affairs, Baron von Neurath, had no desire to be carried away by a cyclone. He was already beginning to think that some day in the near future he might just find himself becoming one of Hitler’s ministers (six months later it would be so). The doormat years were over. On Aug. 8, 1932, the minister of the Reichswehr - had declared categorically to *The New York Times*: „It is imperative for Germany that it be stated specifically and precisely by the Allies that the Disarmament Convention will apply to her as to the others.”

On Aug. 29, 1932, Minister von Neurath sent the French government a second message that was equally unequivocal: „Germany asks for equal military rights, that is, the right to decide for herself the constitution of the army it needs to assure its

security. To act otherwise would be to remain in the position of a subordinate nation. Germany is prepared to give up any weapons that the other powers will also give up.”

It was necessary to put an end to this procrastination. Either Germany would be acknowledged to have „equal rights“ once and for all, or Germany would definitely end its participation in such a Molièresque assembly. Every country was to consider it settled.

The French did not let the pretensions of those insufferable Germans trouble their vacations in the least. On Sept. 11, 1932, Paris gave notice of its categorical refusal. It considered Article VIII of the pact as the basis for its position – while being determined not to rely on it. Said article „specified that maintenance of the peace demanded the reduction of armaments.“ the French official statement did not risk going beyond that affirmation. The note from Paris sweetly added that the whole question remained subject to Article 164 of the Treaty of Versailles, which stipulated that „Germany declares herself committed henceforth, for the period during which she will be a member of the League of Nations, not to exceed the armaments stipulated in the appended tables.“ The argument was in complete bad faith. Since 1927 a disarmed Germany had vainly awaited the *quid pro quo*. Once her disarmament had been officially recognized – which had been done – the Allies were obligated to disarm equally. It was a formal agreement, which they had signed over 11 years before.

But France was resolved never to recognize it. Quite to the contrary, since 1927 she had been pushing the construction and heavy armament of the Maginot Line along the border with Germany, which had no military. Paris knew perfectly well that her position was juridically indefensible. „French diplomacy faltered, caught in a net of contradictions that rendered her argumentation daily more feeble.“ (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 135).

Three months after the twisted reply of the French government, von Neurath took up his pen again and this time addressed the chairman of the Disarmament Conference, Mr. Henderson. The warning of July was taking on a radical character: „Germany will not be able to take its place at the Conference again as long as the question of equal rights has not been resolved.“ On Sept 28, 1932, the reopening of the session took place. Germany’s seat was vacant.

The reporter for *L’Europe Nouvelle*, in the issue of Oct 11, 1932, writes that the mood is ominous „under a gloomy sky and in an atmosphere more lusterless and more bleak than the autumn sky or the waters of the lake.“ The delegations look each other over. Most of the delegates observe a distrustful silence, or converse in a low voice as though they were in the passageways of a clinic. „It is because a death is

taking place behind the doors of the palace on Quai Wilson: It is the Disarmament Conference dying, and the odor of its decomposition is poisoning the air." (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 136). Will the moribund conference end up at the morgue this fall?

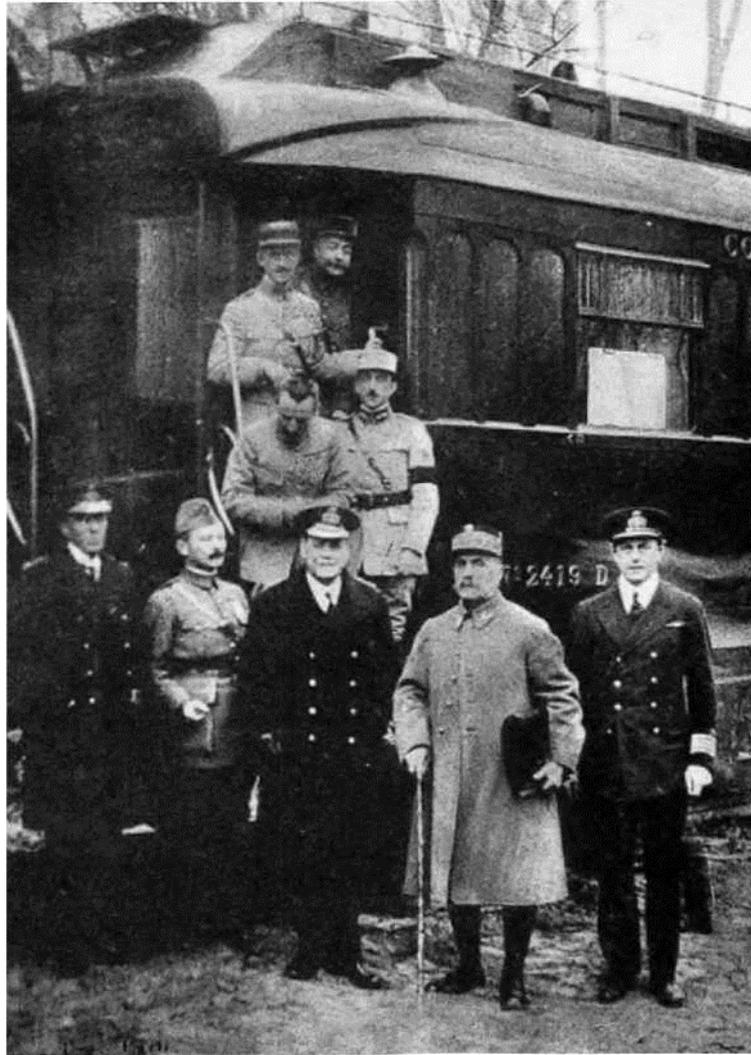
The British were terrified by this odor of death. They exerted pressures on the French, which they hoped would be a constraint.

At last France appeared to yield. But the concession would once again be ensnared in the non-disclosures, which nullified it. The official *communiqué* of the assembly, dated Dec. 11, 1932, stipulated that „one of the principles which should serve as a guide for the Disarmament Conference should be the granting of equal rights to Germany, as to other powers disarmed by the treaty.“ Theoretically, then, it was done. Equal rights were proclaimed, but the same declaration immediately drowned them in a cascade of restrictions. First, the equality would not be a fact, but a „guide.“ Next, it would be valid only „under a system that would allow security for all nations.“ It would suffice then to state that the said security did not seem sufficiently assured to topple the famous rights just now confirmed from their platform. A second land mine planted beneath those „rights.“

„This declaration implies that the respective armament limitations of all the states ought to be inscribed in the planned Disarmament Convention.“ It does not say „were to be,“ but „ought to be.“ The inscribing thus remains problematical. Moreover, the convention is „planned,“ not settled. Nor accepted. Only „planned.“ Nothing at all is promised. It „will be planned.“ A third mine: „It is clearly understood that the method of applying said equality of rights remains to be discussed at the Conference.“ More discussions? How much more time would be wasted? And just how would it end?

It was a punctured buoy that the masked deliverers had just thrown into the sea. It would sink before Germany got to it. While the delegates had gone home to enjoy their yule logs, they still had no inkling in Geneva that the following month a strong man would come to power in Germany, a man they would not be able to trifle with forever.

They had seen his picture in the newsreels, his abrupt gestures, his little mustache. What they didn't yet know about were his teeth.



The infamous railway car from Compiègne. It was here that the surrender of Germany that ended World War I was signed, and the infamous Versailles Treaty – designed to bankrupt the German state forever – was also signed. The armistice was imposed by Ferdinand Foch, second from the right, a French field marshal and favorite of British capitalists, who was also made a marshal in the armies of Britain and the British-imposed government of Poland.

CHAPTER 34

BURIAL AT THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

Even if the British were beginning to get their backs up in Geneva, and still more in London, it was all too evident that Paris would not give up either her artillery or her tanks. Just when it was believed that the last arguments against disarmament had been exhausted, the French delegates cunningly and deftly tossed a new banana peel into the Geneva assembly hall for the delegates to slip on. While making a show, with much amiability, of accepting an armament reduction in principle, they made two demands, at least one of which – converting inspections into a trap – they knew perfectly well Germany would find totally unacceptable. „Inspections“ (and this was the cunning part) would have to be carried out for a certain term constituting a „trial period.“

If the inspections did not yield satisfactory results, the first stage of disarmament would be deferred until the trial period was at an end. And only after that would the question of „equal rights“ again be considered. The comedy, the eternal Geneva comedy, was starting all over again: furtive, refined, tireless. The actress came back on the stage each time with a new pantomime act, but always in the same old costume of hypocrisy. When the smiling French delegates had been asked how long this „trial period“ would last, they had bluntly replied: five years, or even seven years.

It was lunacy. There had long since been nothing further to inspect in Germany, since her disarmament had been completed and officially acknowledged as complete in 1927 by the Allied commission headed by a Frenchman. But it was Germany that had to be supervised all over again for the five years or seven years of a „trial period.“ That meant creating a second „Allied Control Commission,“ since the first one, with its mission accomplished, had dissolved seven years before. As for the victors of 1918, on the other hand, no verification would be necessary, since admittedly they would automatically keep all their weapons during the trial period preceding any eventual disarmament.

It was only thereafter that one „would consider.“ To complete the humiliation of the Germans, who were treated in advance as suspects and cheaters, France called for sanctions to be established which would not affect them, but only the Germans, the only ones undergoing inspection. They recalled the sanctions of the Versailles Treaty which in just three years had cost the Reich three punitive invasions by the French. Ten years after the Ruhr, France still aspired to resurrect those arbitrary methods of repression. „Do you want to go back 10 years, then?“ Baron Aloïsi, the

Italian delegate, hurled back at his colleagues. „Ideas like those are inapplicable and outdated. How can you want to impose methods on Germany today that have already failed?“ (*Popolo d'Italia*, Sept 15, 1933).

In a conservative country like Belgium, which is neighbor to both Germany and France, the government weighed the situation no less clearly than the English and the Italians. The premier of Belgium, Comte Charles de Broqueville, speaking before the Belgian Senate on March 6, 1934, declared: „The Treaty of Versailles is the consequence of a grand illusion, an illusion perpetrated by the men who drafted the treaty without sufficiently taking into account the teachings of history.... We must have the courage to face reality. In this domain, dreams don't lead to anything except catastrophes. What is it about? It is not simply a question of knowing whether or not we shall tolerate the rearmament of Germany, but whether we shall avoid an armaments race that will inevitably lead to war.“ For the Germans on the one hand to submit for five or seven more years to unilateral inspection, and the French and their allies on the other hand to retain maximum military power: that was postponing implementation of the „recognition of rights“ (which had been promised in 1919 at Versailles, then accepted definitively on Dec. 11, 1932) to the Greek calends.

To come back to that was to repudiate for the umpteenth time a solemn international commitment. In that case, Germany would have no chance at all of seeing the European balance of power reestablished during the years to come. Meanwhile, there could well be increased danger of Germany's encirclement, since the million or so Soviet soldiers – a figure capable of being quintupled – might be called to join the French and wring the neck of the new Reich. It wasn't an idle fear.

It was well known in the embassies that France was already seeking to get together with the USSR, as in the time of the czars before World War I, in order to lay the foundations of a Franco-Soviet pact – a pact which was indeed concluded and signed less than two years later, in 1935.

Seeing that the sabotage was going to go on indefinitely and that there no longer existed any serious chance of turning the West into a zone of peace, Hitler, in the normal course of events, ought simply to have slammed the door. He nonetheless made one last gesture: he sent Dr. Goebbels, his most dynamic and most intelligent collaborator, to Geneva. Goebbels had no sooner descended from the plane than the French press tore into him. He was described as „a dark, misshapen little man.“ „His ascetic face was cruel looking.“ „He was surrounded by a dozen bodyguards in his automobile.“ A remarkable automobile. It could seat a dozen bodyguards, not to mention the chauffeur and the secretaries of that ugly little man.

Goebbels was courteous to the point of inviting the crowd of journalists, a

considerable number of whom were Jews, to a press conference. He invited even the most relentless of the French reporters to come to Germany. „You’ll be able to visit one of the concentration camps whose brutality you denounce so eloquently and see for yourselves.” Needless to say, none of the valiant warriors of the pen would venture that easy verification which might not have coincided with the baloney their newspapers had for months worked so hard to disseminate. With the Disarmament Conference still at an impasse, at the last minute, Baron Aloisi and his colleague, Mr. Souvitch, the representatives of Italy – which was then on the best of terms with its former French and English allies – offered a temperate solution.

„The two Italian delegates,” Benoist-Méchin writes, „suggested a compromise formula: the heavily armed powers would immediately carry out the first stage of the disarmament inscribed in the French program. Then an international commission would be appointed which would simultaneously verify the level of German armaments and the results achieved in the other countries. All the powers being thus subject to fixed limitations, the verification would lose its vexatious character which rendered it unacceptable to Germany.” (*Op. cit*, vol, ID, 145). It was all in vain. The siege was laid. The conference refused categorically to allow the Italian note to be submitted for examination, much less for discussion.

Two days later the German minister of foreign affairs, Baron von Neurath, attempted the impossible: going to see the French minister, Paul Boncour, personally. The latter’s response came like the crack of a whip: „It is absolutely essential to institute automatic and permanent international disarmament verification. This verification must first go through a trial period.” It always came back to the same means of evasion. Unilateral inspection for five or seven years. Only after that would they „consider” whether or not Germany, hat in hand, could be granted „by stages” alms of one sort or another.

Under those conditions, what was the use of still negotiating with people who were determined not to negotiate, resolved instead on keeping Germany under their thumb for years, at the end of which time there would be only further questions – and suspensions. At the Hitler Youth Congress on Sept 16, 1933, the Reich minister of the interior, Wilhelm Frick, carefully weighing his words, had issued a final warning: „If an attempt is made to maintain the German people in the role of a pariah and to persist in denying Germany equal rights, it should cause no astonishment if Germany refuses to play this game any longer and withdraws from all international conventions.” Another 10 days of waiting passed, during which time a simple conciliatory gesture might perhaps have avoided the rupture which had now become imminent. But on the French side, no one said a word.

It only remained then for von Neurath to communicate to Mr. Henderson, on Oct 6, 1933, the decision of his government, announcing that, having found it

impossible to achieve an agreement of any kind, Germany no longer had any alternative but to provide on her own in future for the rebuilding of her armed forces, without however exceeding the norms that the other countries maintained or established to their own advantage. The foreign minister's note specifically stated: „Germany categorically rejects the 'trial period'; she agrees to transform the Reichswehr into an army formed of contingents recruited for short-term enlistments, following the principle inscribed in the MacDonald Plan. She claims the right to rearm as soon as the first stage of disarmament has been reached by the other powers. She intends to have all arms that other countries are authorized to possess, the quantity of such arms alone being subject to any discussion." In spite of everything, since Germany was not asking for anything more than the others were allowed, the door was still slightly ajar. The conference board hastened to close it. It made known to the German delegate on Oct 12 that its decisions would be unilaterally imposed and integrally maintained. It added that they were irrevocable: the government of the Reich had to reply to this communication either by a yes or by a no.

Everyone at Geneva was sure that Hitler, driven to the wall, would say yes. It was no. Two days later, on Oct. 14, 1933, the conference board would receive a telegram from Hitler that was short and to the point: „Germany withdraws from both the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations." That same evening Hitler addressed all the people of Germany by radio:

It has been said the people and the government of Germany have asked for an arms increase. That is absolutely untrue. We have asked only for equal rights. If the world decides to destroy all weapons down to the last machine gun, we are ready to accept such an agreement. If the world decides that certain weapons are to be destroyed, we are ready to renounce them in advance. But if the world grants every nation certain weapons, we are not disposed to let ourselves be debarred from their use as a second- class nation.

We are ready to take part in any conferences. We are ready to subscribe to any conventions, but only on the condition of having equal rights.... The German people have no less pride than I. Either we shall have equal rights, or the world will no longer see us at any conference.

Faithful to his convictions, Hitler that same evening called on all the people to decide by universal suffrage: „A plebiscite will be arranged so that every German citizen may say whether I am right, or if he disapproves."

„At last," exclaimed old Marshal von Hindenburg, to whom the years of negotiation at Geneva had brought nothing but bitterness and gall, „we have a man who has the courage to do something." On the other side of the English Channel, Lloyd George, the elder statesman of English politics and one of the men chiefly

responsible for the Treaty of Versailles, was as firm as the president of the Reich in his disapproval: „Germany has right on her side. How long do you think England would stand for that kind of humiliation?”

Hitler's telegram had fallen like a bomb among the Geneva troublemakers responsible for the ultimatum of Oct. 12. „There is no doubt,” Benoist-Méchin reported, „that Hitler had declared on more than one occasion that he would quit the conference if appropriate action were not taken concerning his demands, but no one had taken that threat seriously. ‘They'll never dare,’ the delegates said to each other. Now, the plenipotentiaries are helpless; they meet in the corridors and nervously wonder what the future will bring.” Stimson at first had treated the German delegate as a „mad dog.” Henderson, the chairman of the conference, no longer knowing whom to blame, found fault with the head of his own government: „MacDonald doesn't want to work at a disarmament conference without Germany; in the circumstances, my government assumes a heavy responsibility, because nothing will be done.”

„We've lost the game,” laconically murmured French Premier Paul-Boncour. The man most dismayed was Minister Politis, a Greek as cunning as Ulysses and the sharpest of the diplomats at Geneva. He delivered what was almost a funeral oration: „Disarmament is dead. For it to have succeeded, the great democracies would have to have been headed by stable governments that were preoccupied not with their internal difficulties, but with the requirements of Europe and the world. Now, God knows where we are going.” (Genevieve Tabouis, *Cassandra*, p. 174f).

Where were they going? They were attending a dazzling Hitlerian victory that they had done everything to bring about, by rejecting the Reich as they would have a dead annual. They had thought to discredit and overthrow Hitler by a humiliating refusal, and they had thrown millions of Germans not yet won over to Hitler right into his arms. The Germans were unanimous in their judgment of the events of Geneva. The Marxists who baited and heckled Hitler's supporters a year earlier now hurried to his meetings to acclaim him.

„We refuse to take part in discussions,” Hitler hurled his words at the crowd. „If we're treated there like bootblacks, like inferior beings; if the rest of the world entrenches itself in impregnable strongholds [and] builds immense air squadrons and enormous artillery pieces, it has no right to speak of a threat under the pretext that the National Socialists, who have no weapons at all, march in columns four abreast to provide a visible model for the community of the German people.” At the Berlin Sports Palace, jammed to the rafters and with an enormous crowd massed outside, Hitler cried, „We want peace, and we want an agreement, but we also want our honor and our rights. I say that I would rather die than sign a document which I am convinced would not be acceptable for the German people.”

Even the most stubborn of the dignitaries of the churches now rallied around Hitler. The most „umbrageous“ one among them, Pastor Martin Niemoeller, always the leader of any opposition, telegraphed Hitler. „We hail our Führer in this decisive hour for our people and our fatherland. We thank him for his manly action and enlightening words in defense of Germany’s honor. In the name of more than twenty-five thousand evangelical ministers, we take an oath of fidelity to him and assure him of our constant prayers.“ The evangelical bishops, coming away from an interview with Hitler, were equally eloquent:

Still under the impression of the grand hour that the leaders of the German Evangelical Church have just passed with the Chancellor of the Reich, they confirm with a single heart their unconditional fidelity to the Third Reich and its Führer. (Schacht, *Memoires d’un magicien*, vol. n, 28).

Leaping on the opportunity offered him by the fanatic schemers of Geneva, Hitler, with his lightning sense of action, had at once organized the plebiscite, and that, seizing the imagination of the public, was going to win him millions of new supporters. „For the first time,“ acknowledged the famous and flashy Parisian journalist, Genevieve Tabouis, one of the most rabid anti-Hitlerites, „Hitler revealed to the world his prodigious gift of psychology, using the same tactics he would put to use later in the military domain. By his quick action he plunged the enemy camp into disarray, thus rendering them incapable of using the superior forces they had at their disposal. It was Germany’s first great diplomatic victory since the war.“ (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, 175). Far more than just a diplomatic victory, it was going to be the victory of a nation all of the same mind. Hitler had been given the bridge over which the Germans of all classes and creeds would pass and join his ranks.

Geneva had done more for him than a thousand Goebbels rallies.

It is certain that no one in the world ever had Hitler’s genius for captivating and winning people over. For stirring them, in the grandeur of the images he evoked that inevitably exalted one’s imagination and gripped one’s heart. Throughout that week following Geneva, Hitler had not only gone out making speeches to people from factory to factory; he had appeared everywhere. The airplane had become his flying car. He spoke at 10 o’clock in the morning at Dresden, in the afternoon he put in an appearance at Hamburg, in the evening he was stirring up the crowds at Koenigsberg. The whole Reich was vibrating with emotion. „A wave of immense processions,“ Joaquim Fest relates, „of ceremonies, of protests, and of appeals to the masses broke over Germany. Hundreds of thousands of posters proclaimed: we want recognition of our honor and our rights. War invalids thronged into the streets in their wheelchairs, brandishing placards: ‘Germany’s dead ask you for your vote.’ “.

Even silence was called on for aid. Hitler, a born Wagnerian, naturally made

use of pathos in swaying the crowd. In order to get the entire nation feeling the same emotion, on the last day of the week, he asked the entire population to stop and observe silence for two minutes no matter where they were, at work, in the street, at school, even in trains, which were also to stop: and 67 million Germans were thus frozen in their tracks wherever the national watchword surprised them. The radio stations, too, had interrupted their transmission after having called on their listeners for meditation. Afterward the bells all over Germany sounded in unison. Psychologically, the effect was indescribable. „It was something I had to do on the last day,” Hitler exclaimed. „It was absolutely essential to strike one great blow, to make a gesture that everyone could understand, a liberating act I had to snatch the German people from the links of the strong net that confined them, a net of dependence, of empty phrases and false ideas, and give us back our freedom of action. It’s no longer a matter here, for me, of day to day politics. Never mind if our difficulties have become greater for the moment“.

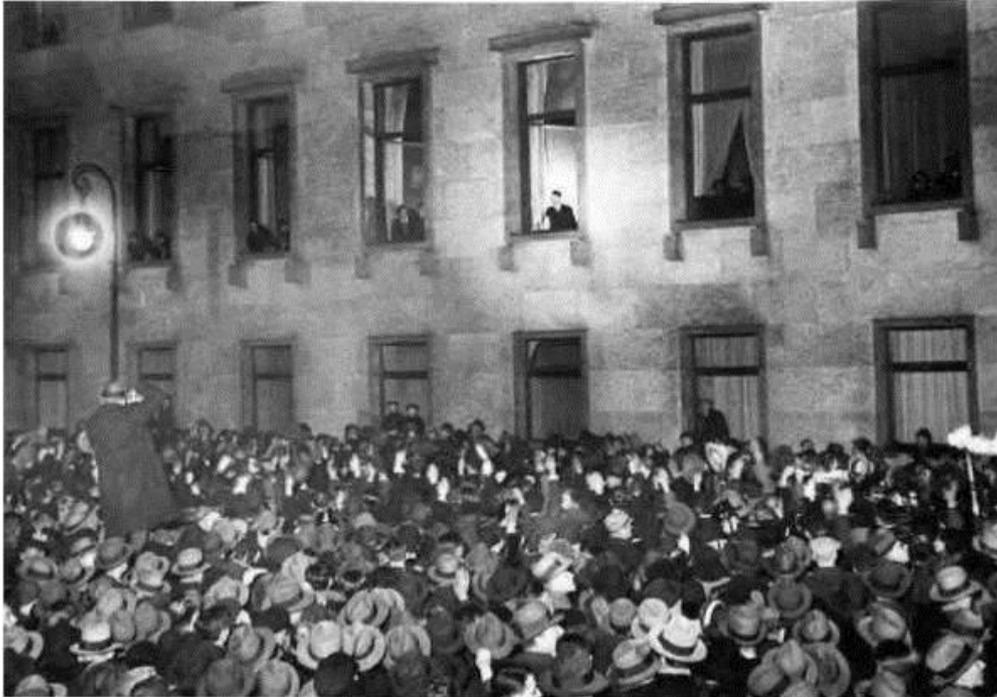
Hitler continued: „What was called for without fail was an act that would stir up enthusiasm, that would imbue the collective will with a sense of the new day that had come. Acts are the only thing understood by the people, not sterile negotiations that never lead anywhere.”

Germany voted on Nov. 12, 1933. It was a double vote: the Germans had to elect a new Reichstag; and on a second ballot slip, they had to indicate whether or not they were in agreement with Hitler, approved of and were satisfied with his social policies, and above all whether, in the face of the intolerance of foreign powers, they supported him in full faith. It was an incredible triumph for Hitler, a royal gift of the Geneva manipulators. In less than a year, Hitler had doubled his support: from 17,300,000 votes in March of 1933 to 40,632,628, representing 95 percent of the votes cast by the German people. It was a free election, rigorously so, carried out under the inquisitive eyes of a hundred special observers from the foreign press who searched everywhere for any indication of pressure or local falsifying of returns.

Anyone could easily have voted against Hitler, as is proven by the fact that nearly 3 million Germans did so: 40,632,628 yes votes out of a total of 43,493,575 voters meant that 2,860,947 German citizens had not approved of the Führer. Seven percent of the Germans had marked their disagreement; 50% or more could just as easily have done so. The possibility of opposition was further clearly shown by the fact that the list of National Socialist deputies had received only 30 million votes from the 45 million voters, instead of the 40,632,628 votes obtained by Hitler himself.

No political figure in any country in Europe had ever been able to reap such a harvest of votes. When a French or British politician, or even an American president, obtains 52 percent or 53 percent of the votes cast, he struts like a peacock. Democratically speaking, this un-trammelled expression of universal suffrage had

made Corporal Hitler, eyed suspiciously 10 months before, the most powerful head of government in Europe. Even ex-Chancellor von Papen, who had been charged by von Hindenburg with keeping an eye on the semi-prisoner, glorified „the genius of the chancellor.“



Having just been named Reich Chancellor, Hitler appeared at the window of the Chancellery on Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin on Jan. 30, 1933, at the demand of the throngs of people who had appeared to celebrate the victory of National Socialism.

The most interesting testimony had been that of the ambassador of Great Britain, who, from his post at the embassy in Berlin, had followed everything and seen everything – the rebellion of the German people, the absolutely free running of the elections, the indisputable triumph of Hitler. A realist, the ambassador didn't quibble. „One thing is certain,“ he wrote to his government: „Mr. Hitler's position is unassailable. Even in those circles that do not approve of National Socialism in the least, he has increased his prestige by the elections.“ He declared Hitler to be in the right, stating:

„That the Führer lost his calm in this matter is not to be wondered at In effect, we tried to put him in the position of being 'guillotined by persuasion.'" (Fest, *Hitler*, vol. n, 72). There was nothing for it but to send the guillotine back to Geneva, to the warehouse for useless accessories. The lesson had been a striking one. But had anyone outside the Reich understood it?

CHAPTER 35

ADOLF HITLER'S STRATEGY

It was apparent that if Hitler were someday to undertake the invasion of Russian space, he wouldn't be able to oust Stalin (and Lenin's mummy) from the Kremlin with a few old generals wearing monocles and a hundred thousand over-age soldiers. However, in avoiding the compromise he had been offered in Geneva of a partial and unsatisfactory agreement, he had also been given the perfect excuse to get started on his own rearmament program, a program aimed not in the least at a confrontation with the western nations, but which would ultimately make possible the large-scale military operations he intended to employ one day in opening a path for his people to the lands of the east before Stalin invaded Europe.

His acceptance of minimal proposals such as those of Hoover and MacDonald was simply an adroit testimony of the wish for peace that he desired to make manifest to the French, the British and the other Western countries.

He himself had affirmed from the beginning that it would be imperative to avoid foreign policy problems for several years.

A large modern army is not put together on the spur of the moment: not in the raising of tens of divisions and their cadres of command, nor in the enormous amount of war materiel required.

Since 1919, the handful of soldiers quartered in the Reich had been compelled to use cars and carts covered over with cardboard in place of tanks. Not a single airplane either. In order to build 2,000 or 3,000 of them, to train their crews, and to devise modern combat tactics, a long period of peace was necessary. Hitler therefore had every interest in waiting, in gaining time.

He also told himself that the „ancient and glorious adversaries“ would ultimately understand that the Communist danger was lying in wait for all of them, the French as well as the Germans, and that Hitler, in taking the enormous risk of a war against the USSR, would free them of that threat as well as his own compatriots in the event that he should succeed. And in case Hitler should fail, they could coolly rub their hands together at the prospect of a Germany very much weakened and at their mercy. Hitler's war against the Soviets could thus be of great advantage to Paris and London. Hitler could come out of it greatly strengthened, and Germany increased in size.

In any case, however well the matter should turn out for him, it would take 50 or 100 years – spent in putting things in order, creating new settlements, in getting some yield from the new lands – before the Germany of Hitler, or post-Hitler, would have an effective force in hand. A lot of things might change before then. France would no doubt have understood in time that a close collaboration with a strong Germany on a 50- 50 basis could assure the two great countries thus reconciled a decisive preeminence in the West Would that be to England's taste?

Undoubtedly not. For it had been her preoccupation for 500 year's to prevent continental Europe from becoming strong. But the thought of having the Soviets spread like the pox had also haunted the British empire since 1918. Allowing Hitler to set up a barrier to the east and reduce the power of the Soviets was certainly less painful.

Faced with this prospect, British opinion could change and the leaders of the British Empire weigh and consider. The most Important English newspapers proved conciliatory. The most clearheaded Britisher, the prince of Wales and heir apparent to the throne, appreciated Hitler's actions and proudly affirmed that it would fulfill his greatest ambition one day to effect the reconciliation of the British and German peoples. A number of English war veterans visited Hitler and fraternized with their comrades of the Reich.

The two countries had the same origin, the same blood. The day would perhaps arrive when, instead of tearing each other to pieces, they would at last not just understand each other but make a team, sharing interests that were not necessarily opposed. That dream might become a reality, with the one nation taking in hand the protection and organization of the European continent, the other representing the white world on the seven seas and marking the print of 500 million human beings throughout the world. For quite some time British public opinion would be rather in favor of a policy of understanding with Germany. It was only a very small minority of provocateurs like Churchill who, in 1939, would turn things around and blow up the works.

Relieved of the dead weight of the Disarmament Conference wherein the futile debate ran on interminably about a disarmament that France would never have accepted, Hitler, on the evening of Dec. 12, 1933, supported by the confidence placed in him by 95 percent of the voters of his country, had recovered his freedom of action in the military sphere as in others as well. Henceforth he could give all his attention to his essential political plans. He was in no hurry. If only from self-interest, he would have preferred to arrange for a period of peace in the West and establish a basis for useful collaboration before preparing his definite march toward the east.

He knew he would be able to rebuild a strong army in Germany only one step

at a time, division by division, squadron by squadron, tank column by tank column. He had always had his doubts whether Germany would be obliged to waste time in useless and deadly fights over a hill in Oise or a pasture on the Moselle. Their own interests as well ought to have led his foreign opponents to pacification. If, instead of getting rough with Hitler, they had had a grain of political intelligence, they would not have wasted years in provoking stupid and endless bickering. They would have made a few reasonable and carefully calculated concessions to Hitler, while placating him by tossing him a few bones. All things considered, Hitler should perhaps have been glad to see that the French were determined to remain intractable. Once over the break, he could have available for the move eastward not just a hundred thousand soldiers, but a million, or even several million, if it suited him.

Despite that he did not fail to play the game of collaboration. His conduct was irreproachable: he was patient to a fault, constantly finding himself in a nest of vipers, yet for a year and a half renewing his proposals with a moderation astonishing in a man rather peppery by nature. Besides, his policy of appeasement had been very carefully thought out. Either it would prove fruitful, in which case equal rights would be worth the appeasement of the West – and collaboration perhaps of mutual advantage? – while in the meantime he would then be able to prepare methodically for a decisive confrontation with the Communists.

Or the negotiations would prove to be just deceitful jabber, in which case he would regain complete freedom of action. Hitler let prudence guide him in all his arrangements. As long as he was in the stage of negotiations, he had stuck to the Reichswehr stipulated by Versailles with hardly any increase. Though not wishing to rearm precipitously, he had nonetheless taken care to be ready in case the general disarmament in the West should fall through. His preparations had been of a technical and material nature. Since aircraft and tanks were totally banned for Germany, he had insistently egged on his scientists and manufacturers to prepare the most modern and perfect prototypes possible. They would enable him to rearm both effectively and rapidly from the moment failure at Geneva was an established fact.

If patents and inventions were not going to be waiting around in pigeonholes at the moment of truth, it was imperative that the Reich have the raw materials required for rebuilding the military, and at the time they were almost totally lacking. There, too, Hitler had almost immediately, but quietly, sent his buyers on the lookout in all the foreign markets, so that if he were driven to rearm, he would not be caught unprepared. He would not shrink from using the total yield – or more – from Germany's exports for these indispensable purchases.

Thus, excess imports of iron ore, only 3,431,400 tons in 1932, were going to jump to 4,527,500 tons in 1934. The same for scrap iron: less than 94,000 tons in 1932; more than 161,200 in 1933; more than 404,200 in 1934. An even more determined

effort was made to procure the metals necessary in the making of high carbon steel. The chromium ore surplus of 47,500 tons in 1933 would go to 76,400 in the following year. Nickel ore surplus: from 34,500 tons in 1933 to 37,600 in 1934. Metallic nickel: a surplus of 2,000 tons in 1933 and of 4,100 in 1934, or roughly double. Tungsten: 3,650 excess tons in 1933 to 4,300 tons in 1934. As for bauxite, the ore of aluminum and the very basis of all modern aircraft construction, the statistics had been pulverized: excess imports of bauxite, which had been only 20,000 tons in 1932, had increased to 293,000 tons in 1933 and reached 320,000 tons in 1934. A 16-fold increase. (General Debeney, *Le rearmement, allemand*, p. 29).

lasting them all would become a chore. Cellulose, the raw material of explosives had tripled: from 1,000,000 quintals a month in 1932 to 3,242,024 quintals every month in the summer of 1933. And similar ratios for sulfuric acid, pyrites and coal tar. (A quintal is about 100 lbs).



View of one of the large halls of the Rheinmetall-Borsig AG armament factories at Düsseldorf, Germany, where gun barrels were manufactured. Rheinmetall-Borsig AG was a major German defense contractor which supported the efforts of Hitler to rebuild the German nation by rearming the German military against aggression.

Everywhere, too, Hitler had ordered abandoned iron mines put back into operation, undertaken an intensive exploitation of oil wells, and begun the large-scale production of the famous ersatz, or substitute, products. By the end of December 1933, the I.G. Farben company – which would ultimately be manufacturing synthetic gasoline at the rate of 350,000 tons per year – had 134,700 workers instead of the 112,000 a few months before. (Léon Archimbaud, „Rapport sur le budget militaire.“) It is surprising to discover this other aspect of Hitler’s activity. He accomplished these fantastic undertakings on top of all the rest. We tend to think that his struggle against unemployment – which he had cut in half in 1933 – had taken up all his time, but it was not so. He was a prodigy of imagination, of calculation, of preparation, and of realization. He used to say, „I know perfectly what

a man can do and what his limits are.”

He did not go too far; but he went very far. In a country which, so to speak, had no further financial possibilities in January of 1933, he had been able, virtually in the twinkling of an eye, to build up enormous stocks of raw materials which would permit him, should disarmament fail, to face up to anything – and without delay.

In spite of the disappointments suffered by his predecessors over the years in Geneva, and despite the humiliations which he had been compelled to swallow, Hitler had remained rather conciliatory for almost the entire year of 1933. All things considered, the longer the others dragged out their plots, the more time they gave him to gather from around the world the raw materials which, from a military point of view, he gravely lacked. If the negotiations failed, he would not find himself in a technical bind. They did fail, exactly as the others had always intended. And as he himself had foreseen. But when the fatal day arrived, Hitler had been able to fill his warehouses while the windbags in Geneva realized nothing of it. The challenge could be hurled at him any time; he would have no difficulty taking it up.

Hitler’s strategy would be one of envelopment strengthened by the plebiscite of Nov. 12, 1933, and wishing to give the he once again to those who constantly represented him as a killjoy, Hitler was going to do his best to bring the peace negotiations he had begun with Poland some months back to a conclusion. For the Germans it would be like having to swallow the leg bone of an elephant. But Hitler was sure of them. „For the first time since the last days of the monarchy,” Fest writes, „the majority of the Germans now had the feeling of being able to identify with the government without pity, anxiety, or fear.” (Fest, *op. cit.*, p. 76). As recently as April of 1933, Hitler had declared to the French ambassador that Germany declined any responsibility for the eastern border. And now on Jan. 26, 1934, he announced the stunning news of an agreement between Germany and the accursed Poles.

He had just concluded a 10-year nonaggression pact with Poland: the striped poles marking the border that had been so contested by the Germans since 1919 would stay planted where they were. Danzig, the Corridor and Upper Silesia were recognized as Polish possessions or under Polish control. Four days later, Hitler came before the Reichstag to disclose and comment on „that convincing proof of his desire for an *entente* with even the most notorious of his adversaries”: „The Germans and the Poles must accept each other’s existence.” The Germans managed to bear the appeasement initiative with a good face.

Among the peoples of Europe, the British were most impressed by the unexpected agreement. For the second time, their ambassador in Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, took up his pen. He brought forth a new report to his government that was as affirmative in tone as his commentary on the plebiscite: „The German chancellor

proved he was a statesman by sacrificing a portion of his popularity to the logic of his foreign policy." („British Foreign Policy Documents," Jan. 30, 1934). A few weeks later several British ministers turned up in Berlin full of congratulations. Eden, the dandy of the heartthrob magazines and a declared opponent of National Socialism, found Hitler to be „self-possessed and friendly." That arbiter of London elegance even deigned to declare that Hitler was „almost elegant," which was an exaggeration, since Hitler had no sartorial ambitions, contenting himself with carefully pressed trousers and a rural constable type of jacket with two rows of buttons.

Tombier, the historian, recognized in Hitler „extraordinary qualities of logic and clarity." Sir John Simon explained that Hitler was „a remarkably eloquent conversationalist." Hitler had been that without doubt, because his interest was to please the English and if possible to be able to count on their partial understanding at the time of any new proposals.

That was immediately the case. As it had to be considered an established fact that the other countries would keep their armaments intact, Hitler, free to act, offered to all of them to restrict his own to a moderate level. The new army he proposed to raise would not exceed 300,000 men, with the foreign armies maintaining their established level. He was open to any discussion concerning the offensive weapons that the others possessed. The English, as was foreseeable after their visit to Berlin, considered that offer „perfectly acceptable as a basis of negotiations." For them it was without any great risk, because what was important to them was their fleet. And Hitler hadn't even alluded to that.

Moreover, he had said confidentially to Secretary Eden that he was quite willing to maintain his air force at an inferior level with respect to those of other countries: half the air force of France or, alternatively, a third that of all the Western air forces combined. Hitler left them the choice: either the half or the third. He would agree in advance. Well, 300,000 men was not even a third of the troops of France and her satellites. As for the aircraft, that would be less than 500 against 1,400. On the other hand, there was no question at all concerning the Soviets; Hitler considered them relentless enemies.

The French, who three months earlier had absolutely refused to recognize Germany's right to have a single additional soldier, or a single plane even on German soil, could not but view the new plan with displeasure. But Hitler's skill in maneuvering had robbed their position of its strength in advance by weakening the hitherto constant support that had been given them by the British. For on the English side, the possibility of Great Britain's being won over to the plan of partial disarmament promised by Hitler was clearly beginning to take shape. Historian Benoist-Méchin writes: „On Jan. 29 England directs a note to the various powers in

which she reaffirms the connection between the matter of security and that of disarmament. But she recognizes that one cannot confer certain arms on certain countries while refusing them to others." (*Op. tit.*, vol. HI, p. 149). With respect to ground forces, England proposed quite simply that they split the difference: „With respect to the number of German troops, the government of the United Kingdom would be in favor of a figure halfway between the 200,000 men proposed by Mr. MacDonald and the 300,000 asked by Mr. Hitler." (*Ibid.*) London advised Paris to yield partially on the problem of the tanks and to authorize a German military air force while setting up a delay period of two years: „Germany would be authorized to have assault tanks of less than six tons. As for the air force, the plan envisions a delay of two years, during which time an effort will be made to eliminate military aviation completely. If that attempt fails, the Reich will also have the right within two years to build herself an air fleet" (*Ibid.*) the Anglo-German train was not yet under way, but they were ready to hook on the first cars at Wellington station.

The British were obviously bent on being conciliatory. The Belgians likewise. Mussolini, after having received Secretary Eden of England on Feb. 26, 1934, and listened to the report of his negotiations in Berlin, declared himself to be in agreement with „the formula advocated by Hitler creation of a German army of 300,000 men, stabilization of the other armies at the present level." France found herself in a dilemma: to concur in an Anglo-German agreement, or lie in wait for the train and derail it.

CHAPTER 36

THE ARMIES OF THE PEOPLE

For a long time, even the idea of promotions unconnected with class had been beyond the caste mentality of the Reichswehr, which, in its own fashion, was ultimately just another aspect of the class struggle. National Socialism, on the other hand, meant to see to it that the classes no longer opposed each other and tore one another apart, but rather coordinated their aspirations within a framework of strict cooperation, both in the army and outside it. To hear his carping adversaries tell it, Ernst Röhm, leader of the SA, had enrolled people of little or no background in his SA units. And that was more or less the truth. Several of his leaders were even former proletarians who were anything but scholarly in their behavior.

But then had not Napoleon – Napoleon whom Adolf Hitler so much admired, a color likeness of whom he had drawn in his youth, and a bust of whom his labor minister, Ley, kept on his work table – had not Napoleon recruited a very considerable number of his 2,000 generals from among quite modest citizens, even from among former „proles“?

Gen. Gouvion Saint Cyr was the son of a tanner, Chabert, the son of a baker; Debilly, the son of a potter; Oudinot, the son of a cooper. Massena had been a ship's boy; Esteve, a locksmith; Jourdan, a haberdasher; Brune, a printer; Lannes, a dyer's apprentice. Gen. Petit had been a slave trader. Among these generals of Napoleon there were even a parish priest and four seminarians, the most celebrated of whom, Murat, was ousted from the clergy after a scandal involving a woman. Several hundred of these generals of the empire had begun their military careers as simple soldiers: notably Junot, Gerard, Reille, Exelmans, Cambronne and Suchet, among the most famous.

As for the leaders appointed by Röhm, in some cases it went to their heads. Several, unquestionably, quickly took on the ways of pashas, carousing and filling their pockets. These shameless ones came to a bad end and in several cases were executed. Napoleon's generals had not been little plaster saints either, with halos floating above their plumes. Massena had been a notorious pillager, looting Roman palaces. Augereau and Brune had been renowned in the army of Italy for their depredations. There was not one of Napoleon's generals in Holland who failed to carry off whole wagon loads of furniture, linens and kitchenware. Gen. Vandamme acted like a veritable furniture mover wherever he went.

Dipping into the till, private or public, was a general custom in the French empire's armies. Almost all the generals were gamblers. Some were very heavy drinkers, notably Lahoussaye; Desolzeaux, who was completely drunk when he lost the Battle of Pont-de-See; and also Fromentin. And Raoul. And Froissard. And Scherer. And Bonnaire, Tunck, Loret, Chevalier and Bonnard. The most redoubtable boozier in Napoleon's armies was Gen. Bisson, who, according to Brillat Savarin, used to empty eight bottles of wine one after another. The most colorful was Gen. Henri Latour, who, after a formidable drinking bout, had kissed a negro and, according to a report by Gen. Hoche, had ended up going to bed with some butchers. There were even two generals who were bigamists: Gen. Sarrazin and Gen. Guillaume de Vaudoucourt. Five generals had been caught in the very act of forgery, notably Napoleon's own brother, Louis Bonaparte.

Bonnamy and Duhesne invalidated lily-livered conscripts out of the army in exchange for hard cash. Not many of these high-ranking officers were dismissed under the empire: 27 in all, or about two per year, out of 2,428 generals.

And we can't forget their incredible follies. They were something quite different from the incident in 1804, when a high-ranking SA officer was proudly prancing his horse and was thrown to the ground, crestfallen, before the troops. Murat used to put in an appearance at five o'clock in the morning as if he were at the Mardi Gras, dressed in green velvet and wearing a fabulous plumed hat topped with a high crest. Junot, in Dalmatia, hitched reindeer shod with gold to his calash carriage. He had turned up naked at a reception, wearing only his Sam Browne belt. He would later become insane. A dozen other of Napoleon's generals would also lose their minds. Twenty-four would commit suicide. But with all of them Napoleon had nevertheless conquered the whole of Europe.

The French emperor had sought to reduce the depredations of his generals by satisfying their appetites with another form of enrichment more in keeping with the law. Seven hundred and ninety of them were rewarded with munificent incomes. Massena, the number one looter, was awarded 683,840 francs per year for life (in gold francs of the empire); Davout 910,840 francs; Ney: 1,028,973 francs; Berthier: 1,245,945 francs. At times even collateral relatives received gratuities. Thus, the son of Marshal Berthier's mistress, Sopransi, was awarded an annual income of 5,000 gold francs. These multiple acts of generosity did not in the slightest put an end to the rapacity of generals of Massena's type.

Another measure was taken by the emperor to satisfy, this time the worldly vanity of his warriors: the Legion of Honor, the marshalship and ennoblement. All except 48 of them (that is to say, 2,380 generals out of 2,428) received the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor. And that's not counting a shower of decorations from a number of other countries where Napoleon had established himself. The marshalship

quickly turned into a hatchery: 26 marshals, some of whom were named even after the death of the emperor.



In June 1940, after the collapse of the French capitalist regime and its surrender to National Socialist Germany, Hitler visited Napoleon's tomb in an event he called the finest moment in his life. Napoleon was a radical populist who had rejected both the communism of the Paris mob and the capitalism of the British Empire in his effort to forge a new European order.

And that did not suffice. Marshals and generals were raised to the rank of nobility by the hundreds: 845 of them in all. There were four princes: Davout, Ney, Massena – the greatest looter in the army – and Berthier, who had already been awarded an income of 1.25 million gold francs and a grandiose chateau, the chateau of Chambord. Twenty-Three others became dukes; 193 became counts; 680 became barons; 117 were knighted. Some of them remained louts in spite of everything. The marshals' wives were not always noted for their refined language. With no inhibition at all, Lefevre's wife, who had become duchess of Danzig, would say, „It is we who are the princesses.”

Their husbands atoned for much by their valor: 230 generals died in combat. Counting all of them, they received over 4,000 wounds in battle. A notorious looter like Bonnamy suffered 20 bayonet wounds in the single battle of Moscow, Detres was wounded 22 times, 19 of them by saber. Raffet, 23 times, 21 of them bayonet wounds.

Gen. Andre Adrien Joseph La Bruyere, a rustic at best, took the prize: 31 wounds, the last of which killed him at the Battle of Canope in early 1801.

That great popular army of the French Revolution and the empire – the army of Röhm's dreams – had sounded its drums from Seville to Berlin, to Vienna and to Moscow, and from Amsterdam to Ravenna, to Rome and to the Bay of Naples. It combined the best and the worst. In gathering together 3 million men, Röhm, too, was going to have amongst those impromptu leaders, and in addition to a great number of brave men, a certain number of blackguards and profiteers.

Hitler punished some of them very severely, even had several of them shot, but he also at times closed his eyes to a certain amount of brutality and unscrupulous behavior on the part of militants who were morally still salvageable. That was not the main problem.

The real problem was that the SA was neither strategically nor technically prepared for a job as big as that of transforming itself into a real army, and above all into the only army. Half of the SA officers had never been soldiers, since they were too young and there had been no compulsory military service in Germany since 1918. Röhm himself had been only a captain among thousands of others. He was valiant but not prepared for the responsibilities of a high command. He had a lieutenant colonel or two around him, but they were more symbolic than otherwise. Among the flower of the SA, the only one who possessed any military genius was Gen. Ludendorff. But he was muddleheaded, too far along in years, and confused by his theosophical whims. By 1933 he was long gone from the National Socialist movement.

Napoleon's generals had been trained militarily over the course of many years in the school of hard knocks, often coming up through the ranks and rising only after having thoroughly learned their profession of arms, for the most part on the battlefield in one combat after another. And they were led by a genius in warfare such as the world had not seen since Alexander the Great.

Röhm didn't measure up, and his valiant cohorts didn't either. Their lack of military preparation was evident. To liquidate the old professional army, the Reichswehr, abruptly was scarcely possible and in the circumstances would even have been mad. It would have resulted in a complete military muddle in Germany for several years, leaving a weak Germany poised at the brink of a yawning crater.

Stalin, facing a somewhat similar problem in 1937 and 1938, had liquidated some 32,000 generals and superior officers – whom he branded as adherents of the old regime – in order to replace them with a completely submissive Red Army that he would be able to keep strictly under his own fearful control. He had accomplished

that much, to be sure. But in thus savagely and radically destroying the framework of his army, he very nearly killed the USSR. Because of it, at the end of autumn of 1941, Russia's fate would hang by a thread. The new makeshift Communist leaders of the Red Army, most of them come out of nowhere, would nearly all reveal a total lack of competence in the campaign of the summer and autumn of 1941: incapable even of maintaining telephone and radio contact and allowing themselves to be encircled everywhere.

In just a few weeks, the bulk of their armament and several million of their soldiers would fall into the hands of the invader. The direction of an army, or even of a division or a regiment, requires training and knowledge. A general must be master of his profession and have long studied and practiced it in the academies or in the field. Stalin's neophytes ran from defeat to defeat into the emptiness to the rear. Only the weather and the tremendous support of the Americans would enable them to form the new Soviet army and thereafter reach Berlin in 1945.

If Mussolini's disastrous adventure on the Greek frontier at the end of 1940, opening the Balkans to the British, had not cost Hitler five weeks in the spring of 1941 and he had been able to launch his invasion of the USSR on May 10, 1941, as planned, rather than 40 days later as it turned out, Guderian's tanks would have been beyond Moscow by mid-October of 1941, in perfect weather. The following month the war in the USSR would have been over, before the new young Soviet commanders had come to the fore. The government authorities, the diplomatic corps, and even Lenin's mummy, looking quite yellow in its glass case, had been evacuated to a location hundreds of kilometers from Moscow. It was only on account of this historic delay that Stalin escaped total defeat in 1941 and the elimination of his regime – and no doubt also of his person.

He would still have to endure terrible reverses at the Dnieper and the Don, at the Kuban and in the Caucasus, and see the Germans get clear to the Volga River in August of 1942 before it had been possible somehow to form some fairly decent cadres. Her belated adjustment cost Russia millions of deaths. Had they been well led, the Soviet armies would have been spared nine-tenths of their losses. They would remain very deficient right to the end, supporting themselves thanks only to the crutches – the tens of thousands of planes and tanks – provided by Mr. Roosevelt, the true „Hero of the Soviet Union.“

It had taken Stalin 10 years to come up with a competent high command. Hitler, who had been aware of the Röhm situation, was about to give him short notice. Because of the „gigantic purges,“ Stalin – and with him, Communism – had come within an inch of being destroyed.

Germany in 1933 was running much greater risks than was the faraway Soviet

Union. She was surrounded by relentless adversaries. For 15 years they had held her by the throat She had been bled dry. Six million unemployed were strangling beneath Germany's destroyed economy. She was at the mercy of her neighbors. Her one and only protection then was her Reichswehr. Vulnerable at any moment to a treacherous attack, the Third Reich could not have resisted for more than a few weeks, surrounded as it then was by French, Czech and Polish armies that were five times as strong as the Reichswehr and were possessed, on the land and in the air, of powerful arms that Germany entirely lacked in 1933.

In the face of a peril so formidable and above all so close at hand, to disrupt that Reichswehr and replace it on a sudden impulse with an SA army perhaps 10, 20 or 30 times as strong, but which had not received the slightest military training, that would have placed the Reich in infinitely more danger than Stalin faced after the extermination of his 32,000 generals and senior officers. Stalin, however, didn't have to fear an invasion at that time. He had believed that he would have a good many years ahead of him and could therefore send tens of thousands of men to their graves who were in his way. Time, he thought, would provide him with other cadres who would submit like robots to his tyrannical rule. Germany could afford no such illusion.

Her opponents, pressing hard against the borders of her territory for the past 15 years, could leap on her the moment they saw her showing signs of life. And while thus running the risk of swift annihilation, it was utterly unthinkable to throw away the Reichswehr, which, however small and however deficient socially, was the sole coherent means of defense that had survived after the collapse of 1918.

Röhm had shown a sound point of view on a number of things. He had discerned some real faults of which Hitler was equally aware. Maintaining the conservative Reichswehr just as it stood was a strictly temporary solution. It would take patience, flexibility and years perhaps to succeed in giving it another spirit. Thousands of young officers with a faith in Hitler, men of character and boldness, men capable of imagining like Hitler and with Hitler the revolutionary perspectives of a strategy and tactics invented all over again, would have to be introduced little by little, and without too much bruising of existing prejudices, into the very heart of that Reichswehr now fallen behind the times.

In theory, Röhm was not wrong. But in practice he had neither the level-headedness nor especially the technical qualifications needed to form an enormous popular army within a short span of time. Hitler would create it slowly, taking great pains, but still without achieving complete success. To the very end, bitter, ambitious and reactionary members of the high command general staff, or visionaries, would try to annul his military reforms, to overthrow him and even to assassinate him.



Gaston Doumergue was a French communist and collaborator with both British capitalism and Soviet Bolshevism who helped form the so-called Popular Front that brought to power the French Jewish Prime Minister Léon Blum. Ironically, the anti-military policies of the Popular Front helped weaken the French state sufficiently that it could be destroyed by the German military only six years later.

CHAPTER 37

THE CASE OF PARIS 1934

France was going to refuse any arrangement in the most brutal fashion – without forgetting, however, to utilize the subtle distinctions of diplomatic flexibility. In the response sent to Mr. Eden by the French minister of foreign affairs, dated March 27, 1934, we read: „Part V of the peace treaty must remain intact, and we are determined to maintain it at all cost“

Not the slightest acceptance of negotiation of even a partial objective. If Adolf Hitler was not satisfied, M. Barthou added, France would face him „at all cost.“ Barthou, the lecherous little old man, was already brandishing his wooden saber.

But in March of 1934, France was having great difficulty getting herself out of a tremendous politico-financial scandal, the Stavisky affair.

Stavisky was a Jewish *emigre* who came, like so many others, from the vastness of Slavic Eurasia, where several million of his bearded Israelite coreligionists in dirty frock coats, driven from everywhere under the lash of the knout, were settled in unsavory ghettos, way stations on their millenary migrations. Air emulator of Julius Barmat – the Jewish swindler who, before Hitler, had besmirched a number of personages of the Weimar Republic – Stavisky had been implicated in France in a series of scandals in which the Parliament, prostitution and cocaine were all entangled together. Well protected by higher-ups, he had always brilliantly gotten out of his many misadventures. One of his trials had been postponed 21 times. Like his coreligionist Barmat, Stavisky had built up his power by compromising numerous senators and deputies with substantial bribes, as well as several Cabinet ministers and even, it was said, one of the highest magistrates of France. Bribed also were: a prosecuting attorney named Pressard (a great fancier of negresses); the brother-in-law of Chautemps; a former Cabinet head; and one of the most important radical dignitaries and Freemasons of the democratic regime.

To facilitate his operations, Stavisky even had a special safe-conduct pass issued by the secret police. Stavisky had been arrested – caught by accident, at a garden party in full swing at a luxurious villa in Chaville – for a mere trifle of uncovered checks amounting to 7 million francs (the pay of a military officer for 350 years).

Every day, one or two more politicians were discovered in the mire. They were dragged out by the conservative press, loathsome with pus and reeking of the plague. „I am quite worried about the organization of a true fascist party in this

country," sighed future War Minister Mandel (his true name was Jeroboam Rothschild), who truly had no desire to see himself stripped of his political omnipotence by vulgar Frenchmen, especially if they were rightists.

Hundreds of thousands of French patriots had wanted in 1934 to give their country a strong government whose composition was not the result of interminable and sordid bargaining and the dividing up of temporary Cabinet portfolios according to compromise and corruption.

France dreamed of a true leader who would command, who would allow administrations to last, to produce up to their potential and to assume responsibility. But the leader did not exist. There were half a dozen restless squadron leaders who were generally honest, but who had neither drive nor tenacity, nor the genius to attract and organize the masses, nor the imagination to create anything on a grand scale.

Their followers had their hearts in the right place, the desire to give of themselves, and to renew their country. But few among them were sons of the working class – that is, tough men, men who have nothing to lose in a revolution. They belonged for the most part to the middle classes, to a fundamentally peaceful bourgeoisie or demibourgeoisie, and often saw no further than their own hard-won special interests, the taxes that were crushing them, the politicians that were robbing them. To win in politics it is necessary to go all out, to risk everything, to get through every trap and every obstruction, never being willing to receive a blow without being determined to give it back and then some. Without a strong leader whose eloquence shakes up the masses, whose main care night and day and above all is to gain the adherence of the working class – socially the most threatened and without whose visceral support nothing can be done; without troops imbued with an attack mentality, solidly officered and firmly commanded, the most brilliant national revival must end in failure.

Only a leader with a character of steel, who is constantly active, who turns his audience into burning brands, can undertake the conquest of the people. It takes charisma and the power of command to forge an irresistible unity out of a vacillating mob. Only a leader who has genius can take possession of a nation. France had a half dozen mini-Hitlers; it had no real one.

Poorly led, but at the end of their patience and thoroughly disgusted, the French masses bravely took to the streets of Paris on Feb. 6, 1934. The government was immediately seized by panic and fired on the wave of demonstrators as they surged toward the Chamber of Deputies, mowing down several dozen dead and a thousand wounded.

Despite the fusillade, the human flood rushed on down to the bridge of the Seine, two steps from the chamber, where deputies and Cabinet ministers were trembling with fear. At that moment, all was possible. A true leader at the head of those 100,000 or 200,000 exasperated Frenchmen would have overwhelmed the lot in an hour and thrown the 500 politicians into the river.

„If they had wanted to,” wrote one of the deputies, still shaken up after having been among those hemmed in, „they could easily have entered the chamber. But they didn’t do it So it was obviously not a prepared plot, because if the demonstrators had intended it, all the deputies and administration could have been surrounded, as we were at the Chamber of Deputies, and shot or drowned in less than an hour’s time. We were all convinced that the demonstrators were going to go into the chamber at any moment” (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, 183).

The fear was such that in order to make the assailants think the deputies had slipped away and that an attack was now pointless, the president plunged the palace into darkness. The ushers turned off all the lights, right down to the last lantern. Paralyzed with fear and groping in the dark, all the bigwigs fled, Cabinet ministers in the lead, by way of a back door the mob didn’t know about that led to the Rue de l’Universite. Even the leftist press, though ashamed and confused, had to admit it. The reporter of *L’Oeuvre* wrote:

It was a matter of giving the rioters the impression that there was no longer anyone in the Palais Bourbon, and that consequently there was no point in their demonstration. Thus, all the lights were put out. And it was out the rear of the chamber to the Rue de l’Universite, in the dark of the night, that the Cabinet ministers and other personages made them exit. (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, pp. 183f).

The Cabinet ministers sneaked off into absolute obscurity. Any deputy with any dignity at all would have faced up to the situation, even if it killed him. But among 30 ministers and 500 deputies, there wasn’t one who risked getting a black eye. That was normal. A man doesn’t the for something he doesn’t believe in. And those runaways didn’t believe.

For some hours that night in Paris, power was within the reach of any determined man. Prime Minister Daladier had resigned. At the Palais de l’Elysee, the president of the republic, Albert Lebrun, was collapsed in an armchair, his arms hanging loose as empty stockings, totally unresponsive. No matter who came in and spoke to him. He had tears in his eyes; he was often like that He’d have gone off to the hotel to sleep if anyone had gotten him a taxi.

The republic was for sale or hire, could even have been had for nothing that

night Some of the demonstrators immediately thought of the most prominent figure in the opposition, M. Chiappe, the ex-prefect of the Paris police, who had been ousted from his post by Daladier a few days before. He was the great hope of the French right. So at 10 o'clock in the evening they ran to his apartment to have him come and take over at the Elysee, the office lying fallow, so to speak.

Chiappe had just taken his bath. He was in his bathrobe, getting ready for bed. It was impossible to persuade him to put on his shoes and pants. When he woke up the next morning, it was a lost cause. Chiappe himself told me that story one day in August of 1940 over an aperitif at Fouquet's. Pitiful.

The next day, the city of Paris looked as if there had been a disaster, what with broken shop windows, burned-out cars, and the hospitals crowded with the wounded. Meanwhile, since no other career crook was available to serve in the discredited Parliament, Lebrun had been „Voronoff-ized“ [i.e. „rejuvenated“: from Serge Voronoff (1866-1951), a Russian physician in Paris; director of the laboratory of experimental surgery, College de France (1917); known for researches on the grafting of animal glands on human beings for rejuvenation]. Then Lebrun was reminded of the existence of an old former president of the republic named Gaston Doumergue (1863-1937), who was living in retirement in a large village in the south of France – and was known among his country neighbors as Gastounet.

Gastounet, 71, was a pensioner with a salt-and-pepper mustache; he was somewhat bald and tended to cross his hands over his belly like a canon listening to his bishop. He had been a magistrate in Indochina and in Algeria at the end of the preceding century, 15 years before World War I. That is to say that he could unquestionably take a detached attitude toward life.

Life was pleasant in his colonial-style house, amid his arrowwood bushes and his decorations framed like diplomas, and the siestas he enjoyed. From time to time he picked a bunch of grapes in his little garden or worked bending over his salad vegetables. He was complacent by nature; he never broke anything. But in Paris, now, everything had just gone smash, and it was imperative that the democratic crockery be mended. They had thought of him. Two days later he was appointed president of the council of ministers by Lebrun. To impress the public still reeling from the catastrophe, Gastounet had brought together five former prime ministers to serve on his administrative team. That looked serious. It would look national. „I must not forget that I am very old,“ he repeated.

But he did forget. The old man was a little behind the times. He was already seven years old at the time of the war of 1870, and had then had as his contemporaries Badinguet and Gambetta; so, for him, Germany was the hereditary enemy – repugnant, loathed, good for nothing but to be massacred and squashed. He

was firm in his convictions, and he would stick fiercely to that mania, „We are going to resist Hitler,“ he decreed from the moment he arrived in Paris. That was his first preoccupation. In fact, it was almost the only one.

What could Hitler possibly have done to him? Had he thrown stones at his cats at Nimes? He was a „Prussian.“ (An old French term for anyone who spoke German is „Prussian.“ Of course, Hitler was actually an Austrian). That was enough. At the most dangerous moment in the 20th-century history of France, the man placed at the head of the country was a graybeard of the previous century, crammed with ancient hatreds, obstinate, as old men often are, and a man whom nothing would ever change. Within the year Ire would be sent back to his remote little house to contemplate his cabbages and arrowwood bushes once more. But in the meantime, he would have led France into a *cul-de-sac* she would not get out of before the catastrophe of May 1940.

The English had immediately insisted to President Doumergue that negotiations be taken up again with Hitler, „the Prussian bugaboo.“ Since Jan. 29, 1934, a British memorandum directed at the resumption of negotiations with Hitler had gone unanswered by the French. In the month following Doumergue’s appointment of March 28, 1934, the London government had become insistent: What exactly was required in the nature of „guarantees of performance that would satisfy the French government“? Great Britain added, in her official note, that „a rapid agreement based on our close collaboration is greatly desired.“ After two months of waiting, British impatience was beginning to show.

This time – it was now April 6, 1934 – the Doumergue government decided to give birth to a note, as fuzzy however as a fog, and drafted in a sibylline tongue. „We cannot say in reply that we accept.“ The proposal is „too general not to be equivocal.“ „It does not take into account questions of a technical and juridical nature which are still in suspense and cannot be resolved by the mere posing of them.“ the French language is noted for its clarity. That was hardly the case here. A bit later the British government insisted again, but Paris continued to reply evasively to Sir John Simon, the British secretary of foreign affairs: „The French government very shortly intends to provide clarification.“

But the French obscurity continued unabated. On April 16, 1934, nevertheless, his majesty’s government would receive a memorandum. But it was not signed by M. Doumergue. By whom then? – By Hitler.

The German chancellor, instead of cloaking himself in fog like the French ministers, took pains to put down officially in black and white the concessions he had made verbally to Secretary Eden at the time of his visit to Berlin in the month of January. He renewed in writing his offer relating to the Reich’s air force, that it

would not exceed 50 percent of the French air forces, metropolitan and colonial, or 33 percent of the military aircraft of the powers bordering on Germany, whichever suited them. In connection with the words „bordering on,” it was noted that the USSR did not have any common borders with the Reich. With regard to the terrible SA and SS, which so appalled the average Frenchmen – filled with fright in their movie seats at the mere sight of the flags with the hooked cross – Hitler’s document could not have been more clean. He would limit the SA’s formations to a strictly political role. They would not be able to act militarily in any way. So stated the chancellor’s communique:

The government of the Reich is determined to enact measures establishing the nonmilitary character of the SA and the SS and to have their application supervised by a board of control. These measures are as follows: 1. The SA will not be armed. 2. They will not be instructed in the use of arms. 3. They will neither be mustered nor trained in military camps. 4. They will not be instructed either directly or indirectly by officers of the regular army.

With respect to the air force, Hitler renewed word for word the proposals made to Mr. Eden at Berlin:

The force of said air fleet will not exceed 50 percent of the French air forces, metropolitan and colonial, or 33 percent of the total of the air fleets of the powers bordering on Germany, whichever of those two figures shall be smaller.

Hitler carried his concessions well beyond anything the former enemies of Germany might still have expected after their failure in Geneva. Hitler’s memorandum stated in conclusion:

The German government voluntarily agrees that the disarmament of the other powers need not begin until after the expiration of the first five years following this agreement. The government of Germany accepts all other stipulations of the British memorandum, including the setting up of inspection. (The accuracy of these three quotations can be verified in Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l’Aimee Allemande*, Vol. III, pp. 154f).

This triple offer of Hitler’s was all the more meritorious in that he himself felt threatened by the opposition of certain of his SA leaders. He would have to bring them sharply to heel barely two months later, in the course of the historic „Night of the Long Knives,” on June 30, 1934.

The British ambassador at Berlin, Sir Eric Phipps, had been most agreeably surprised by the extensiveness of these proposals. When transmitting the memorandum to his government, he had added a postscript; „The suggestion put

forth by Mr. Hitler himself of subjecting his organizations (the SA and the SS) to automatic and periodic inspection, to which he consents, seems incontestably useful.”

Inspection was accepted. A delay of five years accepted. „Voluntarily,” added Hitler.

Now that the helping hand had been extended, was Paris going to seize it? Or spurn it with contempt?

It spumed it with contempt, and violently. The affair didn't drag on. On the very next day, April 17, 1934, the reply was made known. It was not even a yes or a no; it was a formal refusal to pursue any diplomatic discussion „of any kind whatsoever.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, 155). Thus France gave notice to the English with cutting clarity that she was opposed in advance to any discussion. That left M. Jean Viennet, experienced French politician though he was, completely aghast „The intent to break off relations is evident.” He added: „It is a categorical refusal and big stick diplomacy.... France has chosen armed peace.” (Jean Viennet *Limitation des Armaments*, 1,233).

There was consternation in London. They were prepared for some nondisclosures, as always, but not for a rebuff so radical and deliberately definitive. „It is a 'no' of fatal historical consequence,” sighed Lord Lothian, one of the most prominent personalities of the British empire. When Mussolini, who was still a friend of the Allies at that time, learned how the French had lashed out, he could only predict catastrophe: „In the end, 'her majesty the cannon' will do the talking.” The French reaction had been so clumsy it was almost unbelievable.

„It is very easy to get the impression,” Benoist-Méchin observed, „that they don't want, that they never have wanted, a general agreement” (*Op. cit.*, p. 156).

It would take a long time before anyone would see clearly amidst this capricious wrath. In reality, the French minister of foreign affairs, M. Jean Barthou, had not meant to bum his bridges so abruptly, with such an almost provocative brutality. When the text of the German note had been communicated to him, his first reaction was one of common sense: „Wouldn't it be more intelligent to strike Germany over some more important action, rather than to collide with her over a mere question of regulations? Won't a refusal today just play into Hitler's hand, so that he can turn to his people and say, 'You see, we want to negotiate, but France doesn't want to; and France sets herself up as the sole judge'?” (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, p. 193).

Barthou, the French foreign minister, was so firmly disposed to responding

positively to England, and indirectly to Germany, that he indicated his decision that very morning to the secretary general of foreign affairs, Alexis Leger, in the presence of the reporter of *L'Oeuvre*, Tabouis: „I've made my decision, and it's definitely a conciliatory note we must write.“ (Ibid.) the draft of the note to be submitted to the Council of Ministers was written within the hour by M. Barthou himself and by M. Alexis Leger. Yet the next day, Barthou was going to notify the British of the exact opposite.

How is this turnaround to be explained? Benoist-Méchin, the historian, would write: „M. Barthou's attitude is so unreasonable that we try to find extenuating circumstances for him. M. Viennot, for his part, claims that the note of 17 April was forced on him by M. Doumergue.“ (*Op. cit.*, page reference omitted). Our M. Viennot had a keen nose. Barthou would later reveal in private what had happened. Premier Doumergue, without the knowledge of his minister of foreign affairs, had personally concocted the text breaking off relations. Barthou, much aggrieved, had confided it to his secretary-general, Alexis Leger, after the council meeting:

I was practically the only one in the council of ministers to defend our draft of the note. The committee had drawn up a note of categorical refusal that was adopted unanimously. Today is the most tragic day of my life. I have to set aside my convictions.... [I]n short, I was obliged to let their draft version be substituted for mine. From now on, we shall need to pursue a policy of great courage. (G. Tabouis, *op. cit.*, p. 193f).

He had been singularly lacking in that „great courage“ beginning with that first day. In a single evening he had suddenly changed sides because he didn't wish to displease his president, the vengeful little old pensioner from the sticks who, because he was still brooding peevishly about 1870, had decided to tell the Germans to get lost. To the *charge d'affaires* of the United Kingdom, Mr. Campbell, who had come to voice his irritation and amazement to Barthou, the latter had replied in embarrassment: „I know very well that the note will be a grave disappointment to the British Cabinet. But when a government has six former prime ministers among its members, five of whom are former ministers of foreign affairs...His voice trailed off in ellipsis.

One of Barthou's colleagues in the chamber of deputies guffawed sarcastically, „Having no one else to betray, Louis Barthou is betraying his feelings.“ Another added more perspicaciously: „I know Barthou well. For him to insist that way on the entire authorship of the note means he has no hand in it“.

Extricating himself thus completely had not been especially glorious for the minister. But how many of the political contortionists who snickered behind his back wouldn't have done the same thing? In spite of everything, the affair could not

readily be considered over. The aversion Doumergue had harbored for anything „Prussian“ for more than two-thirds of a century could not by itself have provoked such consternation. There was certainly something else that was being kept hidden. What they were hiding was that for several months the French government – which ought to have been put on guard by similar errors in intelligence and judgment – had been more than ever convinced that Hitler’s fall was imminent.

That being so, why should they have discussions with a man who was likely at any moment to be ousted from power?

The Disarmament Conference in Geneva had previously fallen into an identical trap. Since then, however, there had been the 40 million votes that Hitler had obtained in his plebiscite. That ought to have impressed M. Doumergue a little more than some questionable reports from Berlin informing him of the subversive activities being carried on by some of Hitler’s opponents, some of them consumed by their own earlier failure, others who hoped to control the future. The French ambassador, M. François-Poncet, was informed of these preparations. He had met the principal conspirators on various occasions, had even dined with them for confidential talks in the private rooms of Horcher’s restaurant. He had also met them very discreetly in the villas of friends, or in secrecy in certain covert diplomatic residences.

The most important of these conspirators, and a personal friend of the French ambassador, was the former chancellor, Gen. Schleicher, who, having been unable to overthrow Hitler a few hours before his accession to power, was biding his time and brooding over his revenge. Yet, in 1933, Hitler had treated him considerately. He had even allowed him for some months to continue his private life – when he was no longer anybody politically – in the building reserved for ministers of the national defense. It was not until the spring of 1934, that is, after more than a year’s delay, that Schleicher had settled in his new home of Babelsberg on the banks of the Havel. Before his move, while he was still living in the official apartments, Schleicher had already been very free with scornful observations about Hitler. The ex-secretary of state, von Rheinbaben, has related:

In the course of the winter of 1933-1934, my wife and I received nighttime telephone calls from an informer who did not wish to give his name, but who pleaded with us passionately to wain Schleicher: It was urgent. (Rheinbaben, *Del Kaiser al Canciller Adenauer* [„From the Kaiser to Chancellor Adenauer“], p. 233).

Von Rheinbaben had hurried to implore the general to moderate his words. The latter instead made them worse from week to week and predicted the imminent collapse of National Socialism. „The president of the Reich will have to call me in

very soon," he would affirm, his bald head gleaming, „because Hitler has failed totally, and it will be up to me to square the circle."

A week later, after a reception at the Romanian Embassy, Schleicher and the French ambassador, François-Poncet, had met again at a restaurant. François-Poncet had wanted to maintain the completely confidential nature of the conversation, but it remained so little confidential that the diplomat had become frightened, and he himself went to the wife of von Rheinbaben, who frequently went horseback riding with Schleicher, and asked her to inform him of the danger he was running with his anti-Hitler remarks. It did no good at all. A few days later, right at the Berlin Officers Club, the general had launched into a new and violent philippic against the chancellor's foreign policy. Madame Schleicher held forth among the women with criticisms equally sharp, but on this occasion, against the entourage of President Hindenburg, who had discarded his wife.

Looking for allies or accomplices at all costs, Schleicher endeavored to win over ex-Nazi leader Gregor Strasser, a notorious intriguer whom Hitler had stripped of all his duties at the end of 1932, precisely because already at that time he had planned to betray Hitler in order to become vice chancellor in a Schleicher government. The plan had failed. Strasser thereafter was just a nobody. Nevertheless, Schleicher, blinded by his resentments and his ambitions, and conscious of the meagerness of his support, had decided to give Gregor Strasser another chance in the government he counted on establishing on the ruins of the Hitler government.

The general had gotten it in his head to recruit Röhm as well, the top leader of the SA. The plan worked out by Schleicher and Strasser aimed high. Benoist-Méchin has given us its main lines: „Hitler would be assassinated, and Schleicher would become chancellor in his place. Gregor Strasser would become minister of the national economy." As for Röhm, he would be minister of the Reichswehr „because it is advisable that the national formations and the army be in the same hands." (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, 189).

Gen. Schleicher – who offered Röhm the command of the Reichswehr – just 15 months earlier had been determined to put him in jail and have the SA formations swept away by the Reichswehr.

The French ambassador was closely involved in these preparations. His military attaché in Berlin, Gen. Renondot, had communicated this encouraging prediction to Paris: „I am completely convinced that a bloody conflict is inevitable." The principal official journal of the Doumergue government, *Le Temps*, had shown itself to be extremely receptive to this kind of tittle-tattle. „It is quite possible," it had written, „that Hitler may fall very quickly, and that his reputation as a miracle worker will vanish." Before laying out his plan and his definitive list, Gen. Schleicher had met

François-Poncet again at the home of a big banker. Schleicher's report had been right to the point: „Hitler's fall is imminent The days of the government are numbered. That whole gang of scoundrels will soon be swept away.“

It seems that the report to Paris of this meeting between Schleicher and François-Poncet had the effect of an electric shock on Premier Doumergue, the old Prussian-eater of the War of 1870. „It was that conversation reported to M. Barthou,“ the United Press revealed in a news dispatch of July 7, 1934, „that presumably incited the minister of foreign affairs to tell the representative of a friendly power (the English diplomat, Lord Tyrrel) that France was not disposed to make any concessions in the question of armaments, because the days of the Hitler regime were numbered.“ (Ibid.) That was almost word for word the terms used by Schleicher in the course of his last interview with François-Poncet. There is no longer any doubt today about these intrigues of Schleicher and the ambassador of France. Even if the French archives, which are still *verboten*, have not yet been able to reveal anything – and no doubt they will be expurgated in time, in the manner of the diplomatic documents of 1914 – Churchill has not stood on ceremony. He has confirmed in his memoirs the conversation between Barthou and the British ambassador at Paris. Prudent as always, historian Benoist-Méchin was content just to ask the question; „Would this information transmitted to the Quai d'Orsay have stirred M. Barthou into breaking off the negotiations on whatever pretext simply to gain time, even if he had to resume them later, when Hitler was out of the picture?“ (*Op. cit.*, 156).

Sixteen years later, in 1974, Prof. Duroselle of the Sorbonne, an official historian if ever there was one, having new historical material in his possession, did not shrink from answering Benoist-Méchin's question with an unequivocal yes:

The president of the council (Doumergue) and Tardieu were opposed to signing an agreement. They believed that the Hitler regime was on the point of collapsing and that it would be easier to negotiate with Hitler's successor. (J.B. Duroselle, *Histoire Diplomatique de 1919 á nos jours*, p. 166).

The wolf of Berlin was surely going to lose his mortal hide at any time. Hitler's hide. Doumergue could already almost feel it in his fat fingers. A little boasting by some embittered Germans was all it had taken for France to embark on a bellicose policy fraught with risk and danger. They were gambling France on a rickety plot cooked up by incredible foreigners. These confidants of Ambassador François-Poncet were embittered windbags, irresponsible and politically insignificant, with no authority over the public. Only one of them was dangerous. He was the least estimable one of the group, a man tormented by unnatural vices. But he had under his command the 3 million men of the SA.

If he turned traitor, he could cause havoc. He was the last accomplice chosen by

Gen. Schleicher. He had a great slashing scar across his face. His artificial nose, granular like a strawberry, glimmered like a glowworm. He would soon be the most important figure in the tragedy of the long knives. It was Röhm.



Horst Wessel was the author of the song *Die Fahne Hoch*, which became the anthem of the National Socialist German Workers Party. In 1930, he answered his door and was shot in the face by Albrecht Hoehler, a member of the Communist Party of Germany, one of a series of political assassinations that had been directed by the German Communist leadership. Hoehler initially received a six-year prison sentence, but was summarily executed after the rise to power of the National Socialist government.

Here, SA men pay reverence to Wessel at his funeral in March 1930.

CHAPTER 38

THE CIVIL WAR IN THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY

By the beginning of 1933, the millions of members of the SA were coming almost as often from the left as from the old right-wing organizations that were better regarded by the army chiefs. German Hans Bernd Gisevius tells us:

The SA membership, whose numbers have greatly increased in the past few months, is made up at least a third of former members of the parties of the left. It is known with certainty that in the months of June and July of 1933 there were assault detachments formed almost entirely of Communists. They were popularly known as „beefsteak detachments,“ brown on the outside and red on the inside.

Before victory, these SA men bursting with optimism and courage were absolutely indispensable. Several times a week they were called on to maintain order at meetings. As the strong arm of the party's propaganda, they gave a sound drubbing to opponents in the audience who got too obstreperous. They had been recruited from among the ardently patriotic youth of the nation. Also, in very large numbers, from the ranks of the unemployed.

And likewise, in some instances, authentic no-goods were recruited.

Some over-ambitious go-getters had the appetites of ogres. As for the good-for-nothings, they meant to force their way into the middle class with clubs. Some leaders driven by ambition had been interested only in swelling the number of their contingents, since their own importance was thus automatically also increased, and brought hasty promotion to colonel or even general. Their swift rise understandably scandalized the colonels and generals of the Reichswehr who had undergone half a century of toil in the old army.

Once the revolution had come to power, what indeed was Hitler going to do with these millions of idealists – including the reckless undesirables – when he already had 6 million unemployed workers on his hands?... Over and over again he had protested against the excessive increase in the number of SA members. But the SA leaders had turned a deaf ear to his orders because they were too interested personally in holding on to the additional members, in short, here camped out on the hinges of the constitutional government under Hitler's control were 3 million semi-soldiers, some of them unassuming, devoted and disciplined, others brawlers or

fanatics who were little inclined to return to dull legality.

Hitler had needed them. He felt great affection for them because many of them were old and valiant companions. He often forgave them their escapades. From time to time he would say in their justification: „The SA is not a school for young ladies.“ But he began to get annoyed when he heard disturbing tales of the unpleasant things some of them were doing.

The chief of these 3 million latter-day *lansquenets* (mercenary foot soldiers) was a former captain named Ernst Röhm. Had he created Hitler, as some have said? Hitler was a member of the DAP [German Workers Party] in 1919, before he had ever met Röhm. The latter was a heroic, badly disabled war veteran, very much the swashbuckler, who couldn't find his place in a defeated Germany. He drank hard and often. After November of 1919 he had continued his army service as the officer in charge in Munich of a military intelligence section. As an officer attached to the Second Infantry Brigade, he had secret funds at his disposal which he doled out to various rightist movements.

This role did not satisfy his dynamic nature. He progressed from nationalist organizations that were too peaceable to more turbulent nationalist movements. He organized secret stores of rifles, machine guns and munitions, and had even salvaged a few old cannon. Thus it was that Hitler had become acquainted with Röhm in the course of the year 1919, and he had then induced him to enroll in the DAP as member No. 623.

Röhm was hearty and communicative. A familiar camaraderie was established between Hitler and himself. They used the familiar *Du* with one another, but it had gone no further than that Hitler had genius and had no need of Röhm to inspire him. And if all Röhm had needed was for a man of his choosing to become a brilliant leader, he could have thought up 50 of them better able to achieve success in the immediate future (Gen. Ludendorff, for example) than the unknown and virtual ragamuffin that Hitler was in 1919.

It was thanks to his exceptional personality – and not because Röhm had manufactured a marionette – that Hitler, on July 21, 1921, had become the unquestioned master of the NSDAP [National Socialist German Worker's Party], successor to the original DAP, by 553 out of 554 votes. Röhm's vote had been just one among 553 votes. And then there was Hitler's eloquence: without that, there would never have been a National Socialist Germany. That was not a gift made by Röhm to the young „Führer“ either.

Röhm was nonetheless a useful collaborator. Well known in Munich military circles, he was particularly fitted for resolving difficulties when the authorities tried

to pick a quarrel with the first National Socialists, and he had been effective.

When the Marxists had used violence in an attempt to terrorize the meetings of Hitler's party, it was Hitler, not Röhm, who had formed the first group of battlers – 80 of them in all – that he himself led to the attack when the Reds broke into his meetings. And it was Goering, the famous commander of the Richthofen squadron – wearing the insignia of the Order of Merit around his neck, and far more celebrated than Röhm – who had received from Hitler the command of that first *Sturmabteilung* and the mission to step up its recruitment.

Goering being busy with 10 other missions, Röhm had succeeded him. He was a valourous group leader. He kept his men firmly in hand, was endowed with an instinct for combat, and he was at the same time a capable organizer.

On the night of the Munich putsch in November of 1923, he had seized the premises of the Military Command, and he held out there for some hours after the putsch had failed.

While Hitler was spending 12 months in prison in 1924, Röhm's career had taken wings, benefiting, as in Ludendorff's case, from the wave of popularity brought about by the putsch and then by the sensation of the trial of Adolf Hitler'.

Röhm had been elected a National Socialist deputy, and for a time he played a lone hand. He had delayed for several weeks before throwing in his lot with Hitler again after the latter had been set free. He had not even attended the reunion meeting. The success Hitler had met with there and The growing strength of the renewed NSDAP brought Röhm back into the fold. But an important difference was quickly going to arise between Hitler and Röhm, involving two radically different conceptions of the aims assigned to the combat formations of the party. Röhm wanted to turn the SA into a military organization that would be virtually independent of the National Socialist movement.

For Hitler, on the other hand, the SA was to have the sole mission of enforcing National Socialism's rights in meeting-halls and in the streets. In 1925, this conflict, which had been latent for a long time, came to a head. Hitler dismissed Röhm, who withdrew without any scandal, and faithful but disconsolate, he left Europe and went off to become a lieutenant colonel in Bolivia, where he would remain for five years. The SA in the meantime had grown considerably larger without Röhm. In August of 1927, 20,000 of its members had marched in parade at the NSDAP Third Congress. Year by year it continued to expand and become more strongly structured. On Sept. 14, 1930, Hitler's first great electoral victory had burst like a bomb: 107 deputies. The SA was to be seen prominently everywhere in the streets and was vigorously opening the way to the future.

Unable to direct everything himself, Hitler remembered Röhm, told himself that he must have calmed down in La Paz, and that perhaps he could recall him from his faraway Bolivia now that millions of Germans followed him, Hitler, personally. On Oct. 1, 1930, Hitler summoned him. In La Paz, Röhm, his mind still vibrant with the Munich saga, immediately cast aside his stars and promotions. He had scarcely arrived in Munich when Hitler, who was also much moved by his return, named Röhm chief of staff of the SA, as well as of its privileged contingent, the SS, an elite corps created to form a defensive square around the Führer wherever he went.

In the bitterness of the great struggle from January 1931 to January 1933, the problem of the SA, whether political shock troops or future new' army, had become blurred. It was not discussed. They were fighting. All the same, Hitler had never concealed from Röhm that he intended to maintain his basic position. In his eyes, the Reichswehr was the only army; the SA was the physical and political support of the movement. Inwardly, Röhm had not changed his opinion either. He had nothing but insults for the heads of the Reichswehr, even though they were the only ones at the time with the technical training without which no army is effective. Hitler was completely aware of that need. Gisevius writes:

Hitler wished to make the SA into the legal troops of the party as it were.... It was necessary to meet terror with terror, first in the meetings, then in the streets when necessary. But that wasn't enough for officer Röhm. Since 1918 his one dream had been the new national army. No amount of success seemed fast enough for him. No increase in the manpower of the SA seemed to him sufficient (H. B. Gisevius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 121 ff).

Röhm had his plan: „In the first momentum of the seizure of power, the sooner he forced his way through the impenetrable thicket of juridical prescriptions and the obligations of foreign policy, the sooner his army of the revolution would become the national army of the future.” (*Ibid*). Despite everything, Hitler treated Röhm considerately.

Gisevius once again explains: „Hitler must take precautions on *every* side. He is still only the chancellor of a coalition government. He still has to consider decisions of the Council of Ministers, diplomatic protests, and even at times open resistance. Moreover, the old marshal is always there.” (*Ibid*).

Röhm paid no heed to such considerations. If he accepted for the moment the commanders of the old army, he considered them old fogies: mummified skeletons with no social comprehension and an absolute lack of feeling for the common people. For them, a soldier was an instrument that took orders, and that was all. In their view, he was in essence an inferior being. When someone like Gen. Reichenau, a convert to National Socialism, allowed himself to talk to a soldier in a friendly way

after drill, or when he took part in competitive sports with the men – where the best man wins, not the one with the most dazzling gold braid – it shocked his fellow officers, who treated him as a demagogue.

The people's army that Röhm wanted to give Germany was a nation in aims, as in the time of the French Revolution. Moreover, he often whistled the *Marseillaise*, alluded to Carnot, and would have liked to give the SA the spirit of the *sansculottes*.

He went too far. He evoked the Red Army. Driven as he was by an essentially revolutionary spirit, he would have liked to create a German Red Army; for as he himself said, he was more socialist than nationalist. He still agreed to tolerate maintenance of the army for the time being, on condition that it be taken over without delay. In truth, he would have much preferred to create his Red Army from scratch, thus making a clean break with a past of landed squires, which seemed to him terribly old-fashioned. He also blamed the army – and, he was not entirely wrong – for not having understood the imperatives of modern warfare during World War I, and in particular for rejecting the massive use of tanks. The blindness of the German general staff on that subject had unquestionably been one of the decisive factors in the defeat of the German empire.

Since then those generals, like their French counterparts, had grown still more set on outmoded techniques, taking no interest in plans aimed at the formation of large armored units, nor in the creation of an airforce designed for massive military actions. Röhm's diatribe was valid *per se* and would remain so right up to the end of World War II. In 1939, many of those generals enmeshed in the past would still deny the tactical possibilities of armored divisions and take no more than a passing interest in Goering's air fleet.

Yet how would Röhm have been able to modernize a new army from top to bottom? A soldier of fortune who had never received the training that might have fitted him for the job? Who didn't have the genius to invent it and was ignorant even of the possibilities of a war industry? Hitler would prove to be the one man capable of inventing a theory of modern warfare from start to finish, one centered around the tactical collaboration of large and powerful air and armored ground forces. He would have the iron will to impose that strategic revolution. He would create the tank divisions and the thousands of aircraft. He would have the flair for discovering the imaginative young officers like Guderian and Rommel who would apply his doctrine.

Hitler knew as well as Röhm that such a military revolution was indispensable, but, aware of the obstacles, he didn't want to rush things. He believed there was some possibility that the experienced commanders of the Reichswehr would understand. He was mistaken about a number of them. Bound up in their prejudices,

and behind the times, they would not only completely fail to understand the new doctrine but would sabotage it. In order to succeed in transforming the military machine in spite of the obstacles and lack of comprehension, Hitler counted on a transfusion of new blood into the army, thanks to the National Socialist youth, that would change minds and create thousands of officers who understood and who would impart a true social cohesion to an army become part of the greater German community. Alas, the time given him – the six years from 1933 to 1939 – would not be quite enough.

Hitler, even before 1933, had the long considered prudence of a responsible future head of state. Röhm, on the other hand, was impetuosity personified and too violent in his talk when he had been drinking, which was often the case. An army of the people? Both of them wanted it, Hitler just as much as Röhm. But how to create it?

On that their plans differed totally. Sooner or later they were bound to clash. Röhm proclaimed, „I am the Scharnhorst of the new army. The stock itself must be revolutionary. It is impossible to graft onto dead wood.“ The problem was much more complex than that

Hitler saw far beyond Röhm's mugs of beer. The army he was thinking of would require something other than match sticks on a cafe table to be invincible. In addition to the willingness, the strength and the faith of the people, there would have to be cadres and brains, plans and a strategy. The army and the SA were not to be in opposition to each other but to form a double team. The problem to be solved lay there, not in a crazy duel. The collision between Röhm and Hitler was inevitable.



Ernst Röhm was the leader of the NSDAP SA, or stormtrooper, units, and was the leader of the „left“ tendency within the National Socialist German Workers Party. In the period leading up to Hitler’s appointment as Reich Chancellor, and immediately afterward, the „left-wing socialist and „right“-wing nationalist tendencies fought to drag the party away from National Socialism and toward either reactionary monarchism or Soviet-style Bolshevism. Röhm’s death, for sexually perverse activities (he was a homosexual and allegedly a pedophile as well), was part of this struggle for control of German National Socialism.

CHAPTER 39

RÖHM CONTINUES TO PUSH

Hitler would be able to build a true „popular army“ only on a very small scale at first, because the Reichswehr, terribly jealous of its monopoly, would set up many obstacles to its recruitment until 1941. In contrast to the recruitment of the throngs of the SA that Röhm, the adventurous latter-day *condottiere*, had swept in after him much too fast and without sufficient control, recruitment to the Waffen-SS would be physically, politically and morally the result of a long and rigid selection process. It would be formed of the best built, the most convinced and the most disciplined young men of the Reich, of those with the strongest character, who had a crusader's faith in National Socialism, in Hitler, their leader, in the mission of Teutonism and, after 1940, of the Europe of the 20 comrade peoples who would be found in its ranks. The schools of the Waffen-SS („armed protective squadron“) for training and for the forming of their cadres would be of a Spartan severity. Discipline was the first of its laws. A Trappist monk did not live more soberly. An officer candidate would sometimes lose a dozen kilograms during his 10 months of instruction.

Thus in 10 years a million young volunteers would be trained in a Spartan manner: volunteers at first from Germany and then from the whole of Europe, all fanatic believers in a revolutionary faith and all builders, as comrades in arms, of a continent that was at last to be one politically, socially, economically, spiritually. Never before had anyone ever seen – nor, beyond doubt, will anyone ever again see – a European army of a million young volunteers inspired by such an ideal, or representing such physical and moral worth.

But that Waffen-SS would be the materialization of long years of progressive toil, passing from a battalion to a regiment, then to three divisions not very well armed, then to divisions quite formidably equipped, then to army corps and to armies. Time would permit – as under Napoleon – the selection one by one, for their bravery and for their competence, of thousands of young officers of the very first order. A good many of them for all that were ex-servicemen from 1918, become young again among the young, like the unforgettable Sepp Dietrich, commander-in-chief of the Sixth SS Armored Army; like Gen. Gilles, commander of the glorious Viking Division; like Felix Steiner, commanding general of the Fourth Armored Corps; or like the grandfather of the Waffen-SS, whom everyone affectionately called Papa Hausser.

But the majority, who had come up from the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth), or

from similar organizations all over Europe, were magnificent young men, like Kurt Meyer, the legendary „Pantermeyer,“ commander at the age of 34 years of the 18,000 young lads of the Waffen-SS Division Hitlerjugend; or like the dazzling Lohengrin, Joachim Peiper, commander of a tank regiment in the same division at the age of 29.

All of them without distinction had to submit preliminarily to the same iron discipline, and to the same ideological education, earning each of their promotions by their courage in combat and by their decisiveness. I myself, commander at the age of 37 of the Waffen-SS division Wallonia, then of the Army Corps Occident, had been a simple soldier on the Russian front for eight months, then corporal, then noncommissioned officer, then second lieutenant, and so on, earning each new rank „for an act of valor in combat.“ That was the hard and fast rule in the Waffen-SS.

You went to the Tölz War School only after you had first given repeated proofs of your gift for command in becoming a noncom at the front, and had displayed bravery there by earning the Iron Cross. It was comrades with the souls of leaders and heroes who were placed at the head of the troops and not just those good at school work, who were the usual ones at the old military academies of the past. The soldiers of the Waffen-SS also had to be men of a high moral standard. Approximately 402,000 of them died in combat. They were the first everywhere, always at the hardest positions. The least fault, in the Waffen- SS, was stringently punished. Stealing a knife would get you five months in prison. A Waffen-SS man had to be pure and healthy. A revealed homosexual was shot before the entire troop.



Ernst Röhm (center) and Hermann Goering (right) were two opposite poles of the National Socialist movement, with Röhm leaning towards the interests of the workers and Goering towards the interests of the nobility. These class interests had no place within the National Socialist framework, which sought to unite all Germans.

Forming an army like that suddenly was not possible. The human material available to Röhm was good for street fighting and for propaganda. But it was worthless for forming a coherent army rapidly and completely, an army modern and

exemplary in every way and commanded by leaders of irreproachable moral fiber.

Röhm himself was a pack leader. Incapable of carrying out an arduous mission requiring creativity, at the first test on the border, by some ill-considered and tumultuous action, he would have turned the old Reichswehr into a chaotic army heading ineluctably for disaster. Hitler was farseeing, and he would one day have his „Red Army“ thanks to the Waffen-SS. But that would come only after year's of cleverly sidestepping a thousand traps without falling into one.

Röhm, the mercenary, was too much in a hurry. He was becoming annoyed at the cleverness of the statesman. In 1933 and 1934 his irritation would become progressively more and more fraught with menace. Their differences grew still more serious from the fact that in the socioeconomic sphere, too, Röhm was totally reckless, a revolutionary' with an unstable brain.

And there, too, Hitler would be a realist. He had understood perfectly that a synthesis of the economic interests of the Reich could be accomplished only by respecting all the various components of the nation. Capitalism was one of them. Röhm wanted to crush it. Hitler did not. He intended to base his revolution not on a vast social uproar by disorderly masses, but on elites: political elites, social elites, cultural elites, and the elites that constantly renew the industrial world when it is free.

A business leader is the product of a long selection. The rich man's son, if he is intellectually limited, will be a failure in the modern world. Industrialists and economists who can control the development of markets, rationalize production, coordinate their management and labor teams, and open new paths for the production of goods are also elite human beings, their minds always alert, aware of the risks they run but possessing the force of character necessary to surmount them.

Hitler was bent on giving these very different elites a reasoned and sincere social spirit and leading them to an effective conception of society based on a hierarchy of merit. But he had no foolish wish to set off charges of dynamite under employers of labor and creators of wealth who were as much a part of the working world as a bricklayer or a welder. Persecuting the creators of employment, crushing them under an unjust and irrational state control, economically torpedoing their labors – that would weaken the Reich rather than cure it.

It would also make it impossible to eliminate unemployment. It would end all possibility of strengthening and restoring the Reichswehr, which was still, in 1934, the sole bulwark of the nation. There was no other solution for the moment but to maintain that bulwark, however imperfect, however full of preconceived notions, however little prepared mentally to transform itself strategically and technically, if

only so that it might be joined, after years of difficult preparation, to an ideological army more dynamic and more reliable, the Waffen-SS, the true „Grand Army“ of Hitlerism.

There would be evolution, not a blind smashing of everything. Hitler had hardly become chancellor when he declared: „I am resolved to suppress severely any endeavor which would tend to disturb the present order. I shall oppose a second revolutionary wave with all my might, because that would end in veritable chaos. Whosoever shall rise up against the authority of the state will be arrested without regard to his rank or his position in the party.“ (Benoist-Méchin, Vol. III, p. 171).

Revolution by violence was thus a closed chapter. „Revolution,“ Hitler had said, „is not a permanent state, and it must not become a permanent state.“ „We have the task of attaining one position after another and little by little occupying each position in an exemplary fashion.“

And again: „The victorious German revolution has entered the evolutionary stage, that is to say, the work of normal and legal reconstruction.“ He was fundamentally a pragmatist.

Others, like Röhm, bent upon reaching for the Moon, were not. Hitler tried once more to warn them: „From now on any action that is not in harmony with the laws of the state will be suppressed severely and without mercy, for the National Socialist state cannot tolerate any private intervention in its sovereign domain, particularly in its public jurisdiction.“ (Brissaud, p. 159).

Röhm had bluntly taken a stand in direct opposition to the affirmations of his leader: „We are not a bourgeois club but an association of resolute political combatants. The revolutionary line will be maintained. I want to lead revolutionaries, not men who are pleasing to the shopkeepers.“

Hitler was determined to be very patient in this instance as well. He had always been patient. Röhm was a comrade of the early days. His SA men for years had sacrificed themselves in his behalf. Despite their excesses, he could not deny them his gratitude. Röhm's social threats did not disturb him. There wasn't much he [Röhm] could do in that area.

It was Hitler who was establishing relations with the industrial leaders. On the military plane, however, it was a different story. A conflict between the Reichswehr and the SA could be catastrophic for Germany. And it was that conflict that Röhm was seeking with his series of provocations.



Adolf Hitler and Ernst Röhm struggled together from the inception of the National Socialist struggle in 1919, though from 1925 through 1930 Röhm had retired from public life and served as an advisor to the Bolivian military. His return to Germany in 1930 reinvigorated the SA corp, and he directed much of the uprising against Communism which occurred from 1930 to 1933. Röhm was a homosexual, however, and his personal immorality was incompatible with the new Germany that Hitler sought to forge.

CHAPTER 40

THE RÖHM CRISIS WORSENS

Adolf Hitler continued to hope that by temporizing, the Reichswehr and the SA would balance each other off, the former growing larger and more modern within its proper sphere – the military – and the latter acting with greater wisdom to support the political initiatives of the new government. Again and again the Führer repeated: „The one serves the nation, whose territory it defends. The other is the instrument of the party, whose ideas it protects. They form the two columns upon which the Third Reich rests.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 177).

Röhm owed everything to Hitler. Without Hitler, in 1921, he would never have commanded a single SA unit. If Hitler had not called him back from South America in 1931, he would have continued on in Bolivia as just another lieutenant colonel or colonel frequenting the cafes. Yet in 1934 he thought himself to be a secular Saint Peter called to command by the good Lord Himself.

„I’ll never go downhill again,” he used to roar, haunted by the memory of the comedown that had previously taken him to South America among those millions of mestizos, him, the racist. He saw himself become anew Carnot – nay, Napoleon Bonaparte. The German army would be his fief. „All victorious revolutions based on an ideology must have their own army. You cannot conduct a revolutionary war with reactionary troops.”

Hitler, who knew how to maneuver and diligently work his way around obstacles to get safely to his goal, was getting on Röhm’s nerves and exasperating him. In June of 1933, after finishing a substantial meal at the famous Kempinski Restaurant in Berlin, and having drunk too much as usual, he had burst out „Hitler is leading me around by the nose. He’d rather not rush things. He is betraying all of us. Now he’s getting chummy with his generals.” (Brissaud, *op. cit.*, p. 156f).

Then Röhm reproached Hitler with the supreme crime: „He is becoming a man of the world. He has just ordered himself a black suit.” (*Ibid.*) In order to be a proletarian, Hitler should have received the diplomatic corps, or called on Marshal von Hindenburg, in a cap and overalls.

Bringing the Reichswehr to heel (and, above all, replacing it) was becoming a veritable obsession with Röhm: „I don’t want a replastering job done on the old imperial army. Are we or are we not making a revolution? If we’re making a

revolution, something new has got to come out of our momentum, something like the *levée en masse* of the French Revolution. We do the same thing, or we're done for. The generals are old fogies; the officers and the cadets mollicoddled at school don't know anything but their old notebooks and their barracks. Enough of their rigmarole. It's time we got rid of them." (*Ibid.*)

The trouble with Röhm was that those „old notebooks“ had formed indispensable specialists in an exact strategic science. And Röhm did not possess that science. Nor did anyone in his entourage. To win international wars, or even to control a civil war, more is required than just being a valiant military hard case.

Moreover, there were rumors circulating about Röhm with regard to his morals, rumors of a very special nature that were readily exploitable and being exploited. These days, being a homosexual no longer carries an indelible stain. Eventually, homosexuals will be granted the right to a legally authorized marriage. Some priests here and there even take the initiative and receive their conjugal vows in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. But in 1933, especially in the army, such ways were viewed with extreme disfavor. An officer who was a homosexual was inexorably cashiered.

It so happened that some letters of Röhm's had just been sold, letters written to one of his partners, alluding to these rather special practices. These letters left no room for doubt about the homosexual exploits of the writer, who, it seemed, had put them into practice in the course of his stay in Bolivia. These tropical distractions, transposed to a morally strict Germany, seemed at best in very bad taste. A valise was even found in Berlin that Röhm had left on the stairway of a house that openly specialized in such activities. The most serious thing was that Röhm had gained adherents and that a few emulators had been found among his immediate coworkers.

Also very offensive were the acts of violence of some of his leaders, their noisy drinking bouts, the luxury that several among them paraded, their racing cars and stables. The wild and dissolute life of several of them, relatively young men, sometimes in their 30s, had attained the proportions of a scandal.

Karl Ernst, the most notorious of them and one of the youngest generals of the SA, was spending more than 30,000 marks a month on banquets alone (30 times a deputy's salary) from party funds. He had the command in Berlin of 300,000 SA men, whereas in a normal army he would perhaps not have been the commander of so much as a company, or even a platoon. He pranced around on his home in front of the troops like a Napoleon entering Potsdam. He owned a dozen very expensive cars and horses of the finest blood. He had the highest order of the Grand Duchy of Coburg hung around his neck – by the grand duke in person, a relative of the king of

Belgium.

Ernst had previously been a traveling salesman. His father was a janitor. His special morals, too, caused a lot of gossip. But he had been a placard poster emeritus and an intrepid battler at a time when there were only a handful of SA in Berlin. The dizzy rise of Hitler had carried him from a minor local militant to stupefying heights.

Hitler knew very well that the corrupt little princelings of the SA would have to be gotten rid of one day. But he was busy with extremely harassing political and social duties. He was also afraid of upsetting many naive militants by hasty expulsions and feared, too, that such nettlesome revelations might arouse the indignation of a public newly won over.

Ernst's counterpart in Breslau, chief of police Heinz, was a boozing parvenu of the same stripe. He was young like Ernst, and like Ernst, he had hundreds of thousands of men following his orders. He was flanked by a whippersnapper of an assistant with a wiggly rump who never left his side by so much as a foot, not even a foot of the bed. „Mademoiselle Schmidt“ he was called, by all the chiefs associates.

Just as with Ernst, it not only no longer even occurred to Heinz that without Hitler, he and his like would still be waiters or clerks; they both thought they still hadn't received enough. Karl Ernst was very free in voicing gross insults against Hitler. He had uttered „unequivocal threats“; „We shall know how to keep Germany from going back to sleep again,“ Hitler, still silent, had kept an eye on them for months. Their remarks were noted down. Then an incident aggravated the distrust. One day Hitler was about to get in a car that was to take him to Karin hall, Goering's country estate. Sensing, with his special instinct, an impending danger, at the last moment he had changed cars, and Himmler had taken his place in the official car thus abandoned.

While that car was rolling down the highway to Stettin, a window was shattered by a projectile that passed within a few centimeters of Himmler's face. [The projectile was obviously intended for Hitler.] Himmler was only slightly wounded, but the affair gave pause for thought. Only someone very much up on the Führer's movements could have followed or waited for the car with such painstaking precision. Who? And on whose orders?

Ernst Röhm was less and less secretive about his plans: „Assault battalions will become the praetorian guard of the revolution.“ (Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*, 167). He would create „a sort of praetorian and socialist republic, an anti-bourgeois SA state in which the brown shirts, whose number had not stopped growing, would exercise power dictatorially.“ (*Ibid.*, 195). And this was only in June of 1933.

„At the very least,” historian Brissaud writes, „the camarilla gathered around Röhm was methodically preparing the psychological conditions for the proclamation of a ‘second revolution.’ “ (*Ibid.*, p. 196).

With his customary divination of peril, Hitler had charged his most faithful disciple, Sepp Dietrich, with forming, for his immediate protection, a special guard that would thereafter bear his name and that was soon to be celebrated: the Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler.

On July 1, 1933, Hitler once again warned the potential rebels, but this time far more harshly: „I am resolved to put down without mercy any activities which would tend to disturb the present order. I shall oppose any second wave of revolution with all my energy, because that would end in veritable chaos. Anyone at all who rises up against the authority of the state will be arrested regardless of his rank or position in the party.”

The threat was clearly meant for the people at the top. Ten days later, on July 11, 1933, Mr. Frick, the minister of the interior, repeated the stem warning:

To talk of continuing the revolution, let alone carrying out a second one, would be to compromise the legal and constructive evolution desired by the Führer. Such talk constitutes rebellion against the Führer, sabotage of the national revolution, and a factor of discord for the German economy which the government is in the process of rebuilding successfully. Any attempt to sabotage the revolution, and in particular any arbitrary interference with the economy, will be severely repressed. National Socialist groups and organizations must not arrogate to themselves powers which belong exclusively to the head of the government (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 172).

The next day Hitler returned personally to the charge: „The revolution is only a means of coming to power, not an end in itself. In any surgical operation there comes a moment when you have to sew back up, or kill the patient you intend to heal.” Despite the fact that Röhm had been forbidden to increase the SA enrollment any further or to hold spectacular public demonstrations without Hitler’s presence, he insolently replied to these orders by rallying 92,000 SA effectives at the Tempelhof airfield as if he himself were the true Führer.

„Anyone who imagines,” he cried, „that the work of the SA is finished forgets that we are here and that we are going to stay here, come what may. I will not tolerate having the SA shoved aside under any pretext from the objective it has been assigned.” that bordered on rebellion. Already several sections of the SA, stirred up by Röhm’s appeals for a second revolution, had earlier come close to mutiny. It had

been necessary to hurriedly dissolve them. A decree of Aug. 25, 1933, had prohibited anyone not holding a rank from bearing arms.

Röhm had been eager to respond and did so in November 1933. Writes historian Jacques Bardoux in the *Temps* of Nov. 11, 1933:

To prove that he fears no one, Röhm concentrates in Breslau the entire SA division of Silesia, comprising five brigades and 29 regiments amounting to a total of 83,600 men. Most of these units have made marches of several days with all their equipment; and the march-past itself lasts more than four hours. Led by Obergruppenführer Heinz, commandant of the area, the long brown column passes in review before the chief of staff, Ernst Röhm. In the lead, flags to the fore, come a delegation of the Hoist Wessel Brigade of the Berlin-Brandenburg division and the military staff section of the Fifth Brigade of Stettin (Second District). Then comes the cavalry regiment of the Silesian SA, followed finally by 29 infantry regiments and a motorized regiment in five groups.

The defiance of Obergruppenführer Heinz, the commander of the Breslau march-past, had known no bounds: „We are just beginning.”

How was Hitler going to react? How? It is almost unbelievable: by having the would-be rebel become part of his government. Hitler had discerned the plotting quite clearly. But in those months of uncertainty he could not and did not wish to upset the apple cart. The regime was not yet stabilized. The SA was not yet in a state to surmount a great crisis. The Reichswehr on the other hand could not be sacrificed in order to comply with the edicts of muddleheads. To make an enemy of the army at a time like this would be madness. And if the German army and the SA were to have at each other's throats, the other nations would die laughing.

That being the case, why should not Hitler make Röhm, the poacher, into an official game warden? Being made part of the administrative team would no doubt satisfy his vanity: To be a Cabinet minister. The ex-captain with a nose like a billiard ball would take a seat in the chancellery. And then, Hitler told himself, if we put the two adversaries together on the same ministerial council, Gen. von Blomberg, minister of the Reichswehr, and the commander-in-chief of the SA, they will have no choice but to rub shoulders with each other. They will be forced to understand and support one another.

That is a classic procedure that judges employ with married couples who want a divorce after a marital battle; or notaries with clients who are wrangling over divergent concerns.

But with Röhm, a ministerial portfolio was not enough. Besides, in his own way

he was an idealist and little impressed by favors. In any event, it was a stranglehold on the army that he meant to have, complete authority over the ministry that controlled the Reichswehr. He accepted the appointment haughtily on Dec. 1, 1933, in fact almost scornfully. He announced to one and all that he would not even take up residence in Berlin as his functions would oblige him to do. He said he would continue to live in Munich, far from the government he was nevertheless henceforth to be part of officially. He insisted that his subordinates address him not as minister but as chief of staff. Just as before.

Instead of being glad at the possibility of an approach to the minister of national defense, he made it a point to affront him in the course of the rare government meetings he attended. He did not wish to conciliate him, but to throw him out, him and his accursed Reichswehr. The most he would consider – and that only provisionally – was that the SA enter the Reichswehr in force, with each unit strictly maintaining its own authority and all of his princelings keeping the inflated rank they held in the SA formations. The 30-year-old brigade leaders and division leaders would automatically be the equals of superior officers who had exercised high-level commands during or after World War I and had spent a quarter of a century or more obtaining their red collars.

That seems almost insane, but the former traveling salesmen or clerks, like Ernst or Heinz, who had not spent a single day in barracks, even as orderlies, intended in an instant to become the equals of the military commanders of the old Reichswehr. It was evident, moreover, that not a single one of them would consider having anyone but Röhm, whose strategic competence was virtually nil, become their Reichswehr minister or chief of staff, as he demanded.

The reaction of Minister-General von Blomberg was sensible. He did not run down the SA, but militarily he knew its limits, which were indeed evident to the eyes of any specialist who was even slightly informed.

The brown-shirt army is at the very most an army for civil war. It would not be capable of waging victoriously a foreign war. The Reichswehr will never enroll units of the SA *en bloc*, nor will it recognize the ranks achieved in the storm troops. Anybody who wants to enter the army must come here individually and begin at the lowest echelon in the hierarchy. To act otherwise would be to shatter completely the unity of the army. (Bardoux, *ibid.*, 176).

Hitler thought the same way, not just by personal conviction, but because he was objective. „Placing the commander of the SA at the head of the army would have meant disavowing the political ideas I have followed for more than 14 years. Even in 1923 I proposed a former officer (Gen. Erich Ludendorff) to command the army and not the man who then commanded the storm troopers [Goering].“ (Bardoux, *ibid.*).

When France, convinced of Hitler's imminent fall, was preparing to break off all negotiations with the Reich, how could he lend himself to any such suicidal merger?

His conciliatory gesture *vis-à-vis* Röhm had thus served no purpose. Sooner or later Hitler would have to put an end to his extravagant ambitions. „Personal feelings,” Gen. von Seeckt had written, „must never play any role in comparison with reasons of state.” (Von Seeckt, *Gedanken eines Soldaten*, p. 191).

Röhm was raging, railing at the „bourgeois club,” spewing out his hatred of the whole capitalist system that Hitler at that very moment was beginning to whip into shape, and thanks to which the latter had already sent nearly 3 million unemployed back to work and obtained the application of reforms which were completely ameliorating the physical and moral situation of the proletariat. On Feb. 22, 1934, in a speech to the SA leaders of Thuringia, Röhm went so far as to proclaim that the accession of Hitler to power had been „only a snack”: „The National Socialist revolution imposes new tasks on us, great and important tasks, beyond everything thus far obtained.”

„The revolutionary élan of the SA will put an end to ‘the stagnation and the spirit of the shopkeeper.’” (Brissaud, *op. dt.*, p. 177). The shopkeeper in point, it was well understood, was Hitler. „If [he] does not agree,” Röhm added, „I will forge ahead, and millions of men will follow me. We'll have to eliminate Hitler, put him under lock and key.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 183f).

„The revolt that is rumbling more and more in the ranks of the SA,” historian Benoist-Méchin observes, „may very well become explosive at any moment. Settling the SA problem is the absolute No. 1 priority.” From then on, Röhm, for all intents and purposes, was just a rebel. Either he would promptly use his bomb, or Hitler would set it off in his hands. A soft leader would allow himself to be surprised. There was nothing soft about Hitler, as Röhm was soon to learn.

CHAPTER 41

THE LAST MILLIMETERS OF THE FUSE

With the ill will of other countries on the increase, the need for Germany to create compact armored units was urgent. In fact, Adolf Hitler had finished explaining to the commanders of the old army that their most immediate mission would be not only to beef up their contingents, but to inaugurate new tactics by motorizing their forces.

On the subject of Ernst Röhm, however, Hitler remained circumspect with one and all: „We have to let the matter work itself out.”

That didn't mean Hitler would fail to take precautions. But now that trouble at meetings was a thing of the past and complete quiet reigned in the streets, keeping 3 million SA effectives mobilized no longer made any sense. A half or a third that many men would more than suffice to handle whatever political threat might still arise. That immense and idle army was now only an instrument of pressure by a few petty chieftains who were overly ambitious or who had lost their heads. In his heart Hitler had made the decision: He was going to radically reduce the number of the SA effectives, who had become useless and dangerous besides. Moreover, that would be a means of calming a certain amount of the uneasiness that had arisen in other countries, where the existence of the SA had caused apprehension in the public mind. We know that on Feb. 21, 1934, Hitler had announced to Mr. Anthony Eden of Britain that he was going to reduce the SA by two-thirds, thus by about 2 million men.

Those remaining would be no more than a simple politico-civil organization „without military duties of any land.” Mr. Doumergue had arrogantly rejected those pledges made by Hitler. And Röhm had been yet more arrogant than President Doumergue. With that proposal of Hitler's government, Röhm saw himself on the point of being shipped at any moment of two-thirds of his cohorts, who would then be further reduced to a troop emasculated not just numerically but weapons-wise, since in the future they would be less well armed than the municipal guards.

Röhm had not waited more than 24 hours before pouring out his fury.

The SA form an unshakable bastion raised against reaction, the *petit bourgeois* and the hypocrites, for they embody everything represented by the idea of revolution. From the very first day, the fighter in the brown shirt has marched on the road that leads to revolution, and he will not move aside from

that road by so much as a foot" (Brissaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 189f).

And again:

The new German regime, manifesting an incomprehensible indulgence, is not ruthlessly sweeping away the supports and the henchmen of the old regime.... „Peace" and „order" – those are their passwords. And in that spirit they meet with all levels and all factions of the hidebound bourgeoisie. (*Ibid.*)

„Reaction and revolution," he shouted, „are mortal enemies! There is no bridge that can be laid between them! The one excludes the other!" (*Ibid.*)

For form's sake, Röhm had made reference still to fidelity to Hitler. But what imaginable fidelity could there be after such a rejection? Röhm had definitely crossed the Rubicon even if he did not understand what that historic rebellion signified. Röhm had not in fact waited for this occasion to start his counterthrust. For weeks the Schleicher-Strasser-Röhm plot had been a reality. Loose talk and bragging had already made it known to the state police. The participation of the French ambassador in their intrigues was known. His visits and meetings with the apprentice conspirators were followed. Röhm had increased the importance of his forces as much as possible. He had created his own totally independent political service and public relations service.

„He organized a new series of immense processions and tried in general to demonstrate by uninterrupted triumphant parades that the forces of the SA were intact. At the same time he had procured fairly large quantities of arms, in part by purchases abroad." (Fest, *op. oil.*, p. 92). Arms for what? Against whom? Against the army? Against Hitler? If not, against whom, then?

„It is undeniable that these activities were resented by Hitler and by the military leaders as a provocation. The Reichswehr chiefs appeared more openly in public." (*Ibid.*) „Röhm is losing out," Gen. Werner von Blomberg concluded laconically. „His account will soon be settled."

For their part, Röhm's men were ready. We read in Benoist-Méchin:

Three groups exist at this time among the commandants of the SA. First a little „camarilla" gathered around Röhm consisting of the most powerful generals of the brown shirt army and bound together by shared ambition and morals. Then a certain number of commanders who have no allegiance to this coterie but who continue to obey Röhm out of a spirit of discipline. Finally, a few commanders ousted from the High Command who are disturbed by Röhm's plans. (*Histoire de VArmee AUemand*, vol. HI, pp. 180 ff).

Some of them were already taking action. Benoist-Méchin continues:

Emboldened by the cynical declarations and the bad example of their commanders, small groups of SA members begin here and there to engage in acts of violence. In the latter days of May, squads of brown shirts ransack the big Kaarstadt stores in Hamburg, and the police have to intervene to reestablish order. Scenes of the same sort take place in Frankfurt and Dresden. At Munich, where spirits are running especially high, guards of the General Staff are wandering the streets and singing revolutionary verses. One of them has this significant verse for its refrain: „Sharpen your long knives on the edge of the sidewalk.” (*Ibid.*)

It went far beyond that: „They do not hesitate to proclaim that the second revolution is close at hand, that the day it begins they will settle their accounts with all their enemies, and that that will be the start of carnage such as Germany has never seen.” (*Ibid.*) This time the Reich was on the threshold of all-out, bloody civil war.

Hitler would make one last attempt On June 4, 1934, he summoned Röhm to the chancellery and for five hours hammered away, trying to convince him. Hitler himself has related how hard he tried. „I adjured him: Strive against all that folly to avoid a catastrophe. It was in vain. The discussion lasted fruitlessly until midnight.” Hitler did not fail either to tell Röhm what he could expect if he persevered in his senseless plan: „I will personally – and immediately – smash any attempt that might plunge Germany back into anarchy; anyone who attacks the administration must be prepared to number it among his enemies.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 182). Röhm left the chancellery cursing and would not be seen there ever again.

He understands that he will never win Hitler over to his views. He makes a show of yielding to the Führer’s admonishments. But he immediately forms a second plan, which he communicates to the members of his entourage. The SA will shortly launch a sudden attack in Berlin and occupy the ministerial buildings by surprise. Hitler will be imprisoned first thing and put in solitary confinement... The plan is immediately adopted by the „camarilla.” Hayn in Saxony and Heinz in Silesia sound out the police to learn how they will react. (*Ibid.*)

The plot, if we are to believe the communication of the French ambassador to his government, would have gone beyond just arresting the Führer: his arrest would have been followed by his physical liquidation.

One other fact is conclusive: With an eye to the operation, Röhm had put together a secret fund of 12 million marks. The fact is formally confirmed by Benoist-Méchin: „A war chest of 12 million marks had been collected” (*Ibid.*) – a fantastic sum for those times. Before the decisive elections of March of 1933 assured Hitler the vote, giving him plenary powers, Dr. Hjalmar H. G. Schacht had invited the 12 most important businessmen of Germany to a meeting and had afterward collected, in his

hat, checks amounting to 3 million marks. That sum had served to finance the great election campaigns not only of Hitler's party, but of the so-called national parties of Alfred Hilgenberg, Franz von Papen and associates. On the day of the vote there were still 600,000 marks in the treasury that had not been spent.

In other words, the 12 million marks secretly collected by Röhm through pressure on financial circles represented a subversive force whose like no group in Germany had ever before possessed.



Here, Adolf Hitler salutes marching SA men as their commander Ernst Röhm stands watching in the background. The two are riding in one of the famous Mercedes autos that was provided to the National Socialist German leadership.

Acting with the greatest urgency, Hitler decided on June 6, 1934, to send the entire SA on vacation for a month. That would perhaps still give him time to find a compromise solution. At the same time, it would give proof to the other countries that Hitler's government did not need the 3 million SA to stay in power or maintain public order, since Hitler would be able to dispense with them quite readily for an entire month.

Two days later, on June 8, 1934, Röhm reacted with unconcealed anger: „The enemies of the SA will receive the answer they deserve at the right time and in the manner of our choosing. If our enemies believe that the SA will not return from their leave, or will return only partially, they are mistaken. The SA are and will remain the masters of Germany's destiny.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, p. 183). One could hardly announce more deliberately that there would soon be a settling of accounts.

A significant detail: at a time when every communication made to the SA was invariably ended with the prescribed „*Heil Hitler*” this time the salute was omitted, as if the Führer had already ceased to exist. Speaking of this plot that people after 1945 were pleased to depict as „an imaginary plot of course,” the Hitler scorners

have since then had to pull in their horns a bit. Former police officer Gisevius, a fanatical anti-Hitlerite, was forced to acknowledge:

There is indubitably some truth in the story of the putsch. First of all, everyone can smell that „second revolution“ there is so much talk about the SA are sharpening their daggers, though they aren't the only ones. Sooner or later Röhm is going to strike by the sheer force of circumstances. In the second place, it is very possible that he and Gen. Kurt von Schleicher have something cooked up between them. There surely must have been some cynical words said in the course of the evening passed in the company of François-Poncet.

The French historian Andre Brissaud, also no Nazi, has asked himself the question again and again: „Did Röhm really have any plans for a putsch?“ His answer „It is impossible to rule out the possibility.“ In vain he has tried to find some document or other in the archives of Nuremberg that would make it possible to deny the plot „The criminal case concerning the affair of the Night of the Long Knives, which took place from the 6th to the 14th of May of 1954 at Munich, and which I attended, shed no light on this important point“

„The commander of the SA,“ he adds, „was no plaster saint, and it is possible if not probable that at this important turning point in his political rise, Röhm once again followed his natural bent, which was to risk his destiny in conspiracy and revolutionary combat“ (Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*.) „At the very least“ Brissaud adds, „the camarilla gathered around Röhm was preparing the psychological conditions for proclaiming a second revolution.“ (*Ibid.*)

Röhm's aim is no longer contested. Even by Brissaud.

He acknowledged:

There is every reason to believe that Röhm was dallying with plans which, had they been successful, would have brought about the elimination of the Führer rather quickly. Many historians wishing to paint Hitler blacker than he was in the affair have applied too much whitewash to Röhm ... What Röhm wanted was a sort of praetorian socialist republic, an SA antibourgeois state in which the brown shirts, whose numbers had never ceased to increase, would exercise power directly. The Hitler-Röhm conflict was a very deep-seated one. And Röhm's repeated challenges, the demonstrations of force by the SA, and the threats made by their leader, were certainly indicative of a will to action that must have seemed to the wary old birds on the overcrowded general staff like plans for a putsch. *Sharpen Your Long Knives* is certainly a song of the SA. (Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*).

We know how after World War II the whole Röhm affair was twisted and presented to the public in detective serial fashion as a base squaring of accounts between the bloodthirsty Hitler and an SA commander of whom he was jealous. The most stupid kind of tittle-tattle has been presented as solid fact. But today the truth is not even debatable any longer. It has been established not on the basis of ludicrous bunkum, but on official documents and historical testimony. Röhm was in a state of rebellion. His bully boys were ready for anything. To overthrow Hitler. To imprison him. To assassinate him. Gen. Schleicher, for his part, had decided to make Röhm and Gregor Strasser the two leading lights of his coming government the French ambassador, M. François Poncet was in frequent contact with the future putschists and kept his government accurately informed about them. His military attaché, Gen. Renqudot, announced in his final report that „a bloody conflict is inevitable.”

A strange malaise was sensed everywhere. „Tilings are going badly,” Marshal von Hindenburg growled. He had called Hitler to his summer residence at Neudeck. „It is high time you put your house in a little order. Get rid of the troublemakers who are compromising the National Socialist regime.”

The explosive’s last millimeters of fuse were burning. The bomb could go off at any time. Who would be first to throw it, Hitler or Röhm? „We have to act,” Hitler said at last. „We have to strike, and strike fast”



During the Night of the Long Knives, also known as Operation Hummingbird, the National Socialist German leadership assassinated a group of both right- and left-wing political opponents who had been planning an armed uprising and coup against Hitler's government. Among those dead was Gregor Strasser, leader of the radical „left“ tendency of the National Socialist German Workers Party, and former chancellors Kurt von Schleicher and Gustav Ritter von Kahr. Röhm became implicated in this plot and was executed by Hitler, who later stated Röhm had been executed by mistake.

CHAPTER 42

THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

A man who had not yet appeared openly in the Röhm-Schleicher-Strasser affair was Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen. Von Papen had been placed in this position close to Adolf Hitler by Oskar von Hindenburg on Jan. 30, 1933, to keep an eye on the Führer, and after three months he was already hardly more than a vaguely recognized supernumerary in the chancellery. He was morose. That Hitler fellow, who was gaining an ever-greater following, was getting on his nerves. It irritated him. No one had ever followed him. In 1932, in the Reichstag, he had been whipped by a vote of no confidence, with 96 percent of the parliamentary vote lined up against him. Impeccable in his cutaway and top hat, but, still, what did he amount to?

On June 14, 1934, Hitler had gone to Italy for his first visit with Mussolini. Papen, who was not brave by nature, was going to take advantage of this absence of his chief executive to make a speech against him three days after his departure which would be a rather pedantic match for the twisted intrigues and the delusions of his former friend, then ex-friend, then new friend, Gen. Kurt von Schleicher. The speech that Papen was going to make was not his own. A „ghost“ had written it for him. His name was Edgard Jung, and his anti-Hitler writings were going to cost him rather dearly. Papen had chosen the town of Fulda, an old ecclesiastical metropolis, for pulling off his coup. The text that Jung had given him was almost laughably exaggerated, particularly inasmuch as it was supposedly written by a man who, while occupying the Reich's chancellorship before Hitler, had proved himself incapable of accomplishing anything at all.

That he, whose political past had been a cipher, should pretend to give lessons to someone who had just put more than two million of Germany's unemployed back to work in only a few months was utterly presumptuous.

Papen spelled out his prefabricated pages at Marburg with the conviction of a stationmaster. „Germany must not be a train launched haphazardly into the future, with nobody knowing where it will stop.... Great men are not created by propaganda, but by the valor of their actions and the judgment of history.... A defective or half-educated intelligence does not qualify one to engage in a battle against the spirit.“ But the bishops, champions in all types of political quarrels, and whose spokesman Papen had hoped to be that day, had immediately fallen silent, miters inclined meekly over their breviaries.

Brüning, the ex-chancellor, realizing that Papen's speech had misfired and smelled of heresy, would clear out that very week and make tracks for the Americas. When Hitler had deplaned on his return from Venice, he would make it his business to reply. After having read a report of the speech written by Papen's ghostwriter, Hitler moved to deal with his very strange colleague, who had thought he was being so clever.

A few hours after landing, Hitler challenged him symbolically from the rostrum at a public meeting at Gera in Thuringia: „All these little midgets who imagine they have something to say will be swept away by the power of our idea of the community. Because, whatever criticisms they believe themselves capable of formulating, all these midgets forget one thing: where is this better thing that could replace what is? Where do they keep whatever it is they want to put in its place? Ridiculous, this little worm who wants to combat such a powerful renewal of a people.” (Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son temps*, p. 197).

Schleicher, who had been delighted by Papen's sabotage, was just putting the final touches on his future government. The list was already making the rounds: Everyone's role was already fixed, as we may read in Benoist-Méchin: „Hitler will be assassinated. Schleicher will become chancellor in his place. Gregor Strasser will receive the portfolio of national economy. As for Ernst Röhm, he will become minister of the Reichswehr.”

„It is fitting,” Schleicher says, „that the army and the national formations be in the same hands.” Strasser and Röhm having approved his program, Schleicher felt assured of success, (Benoist-Méchin, *Histoire de l'Armée Allemande*, Vol. III, p. 189).

And so a general who was choking with ambition, a general who six months earlier, as minister of national defense, was directly responsible for the Reichswehr, was now determined to place all the generals of the Reichswehr, his own colleagues, under the command of Röhm, the constant insulter of the old army. Resentment had turned him into a traitor, this swaggering, cynical man. The thirst for power was consuming him with fury, and he was ready to ally himself with anyone to regain it. Harshly, historian Benoist-Méchin writes: „He considers that the hour has come to make someone pay for his disgrace. A general without an army, a fascist without conviction, and a socialist without any support among the working class, in losing his Cabinet post he has lost his friends. But now that events seem to be turning in his favor, he sees the possibility of getting it all back with a single blow.” (*op. cit.*, vol. DI, pp. 188f).

Rumors leaked out concerning the still semi-secret crisis, causing frightened reactions. On June 25 of 1934, Hitler was informed that in 15 days the gold reserves of the Reichsbank had dwindled from 925 million marks to 150 million. „The

agitation of the SA has caused disquiet in industrial and banking circles.”

Everything tallied: the army threatened; anarchy on the horizon; the specter of devaluation hanging over the Reich. Hitler’s lieutenants raised their voices. Rudolf Hess on June 26, 1934, announced on the radio at Cologne: „The Führer will pardon minor personal deviations considering the magnitude of the achievements made. But if the party is obliged to join battle, it will do so according to the National Socialist principle: if you strike, strike hard.”

„National Socialism cannot be replaced,” he added, „not by hand-picked conservative forces nor by criminal intrigues given the pompous name of ‘second revolution.’ Adolf Hitler is, and remains, a revolutionary in the grand style. He has no need of crutches.” Hermann Goering was just as firm at Hamburg, on June 28: „Pulling a people out of the mire to raise it toward the Sun is a superhuman task. The basis on which the Reich rests is confidence in the Führer.” Then his warning sounded like the crack of a rifle: „Whoever seeks to destroy that confidence has signed his death warrant”

More and more precise information was brought to Hitler, some of it real and some no doubt exaggerated by uneasy imaginings or understood only more or less exactly by the listening services. These transcriptions of wiretapped telephone conversations of the conspirators were full of gross insults directed at Hitler. Secret agents followed the suspects. Letters were seized as well, very accusing letters. Goering was most impressed by the documents.

„Feverish preparations are also being made in the National Socialist camp. The black militia are in a state of alert. A certain number of SS sections are armed with rifles and 120 cartridges per rifle. The shock troops known as the SS Section Grossbeeren are on a war footing. Certain formations of the automobile corps, or NSKK, are mobilized and armed with carbines.” (Account of the events of June 30 from *The Manchester Guardian* of the following Aug. 9).

It is June 28, 1934: Hitler has left for Essen, where he has to attend a wedding and to meet some big industrialists in the field of metallurgy. On the following day, June 29, 1934, he will inspect the Labor Service camps in Westphalia. Then, out of the blue, he is going to receive news of the most alarming nature: „Röhm has given orders to all the SA commanders to join him on the shores of the Tegernsee [Lake Tegern] on the afternoon of June 30, and all units of the SA have received orders to remain at the disposal of their commanders.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 192).

Now, the next day, the first of July, is precisely the day when the leave decreed by Hitler for the 3 million men of the SA is to begin. Hitler himself has given us an account of these particularly dramatic hours:

„The mobilization of the SA on the eve of their departure on leave seemed to me very unusual. I decided therefore to relieve the chief of staff of his duties on Saturday, June 30; to put him under close arrest until further orders; and to eliminate a certain number of SA commanders whose criminal activities were notorious.”

„Given the tenseness of events, I thought that the chief of staff would probably not obey me if I ordered him to Berlin or elsewhere. I consequently resolved to go myself to the conference of the commanders of the SA. Relying on my personal authority and on the decisiveness that had never failed me in critical moments, I planned to arrive there on Saturday at noon, to dismiss the chief of staff on the spot, to arrest the principal instigators of the plot, and to address a rousing appeal to the commandants of the SA to recall them to their duties.” (Cited by Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 192).

Hitler has just ended his Westphalia visit among the young workers. He has arrived to spend the night at a hotel he is fond of, the home of an old comrade, Herr Dreesen. From his balcony he looks out over a beautiful stretch of the Rhine. As if the heavens wish to join in his personal drama, a storm, thunderclaps and flashes of lightning burst in a veritable Wagnerian hurricane. Goebbels has come at 9:30 p.m. in a special plane from Berlin to bring him other messages that have come in hour by hour to increase the disquiet.

„The alert has been given in the capital for the following day at 4 p.m. Trucks have been requisitioned to transport the shock troops; the action will begin at 5 p.m. sharp with the sudden occupation of the ministerial buildings.” (Benoist-Méchin, *op. dt.*, p. 194).

There is no time to sift through each of the reports, to weigh which are true and which fraudulent or imaginary. „I’ve had enough of this.” Hitler cries. „It was imperative to act with lightning speed. Only a swift and sudden intervention was perhaps still capable of stemming the revolt. There was no room for doubt here: it would be better to kill 100 conspirators than to let 10,000 innocent SA men and 10,000 equally innocent civilians kill each other.” (*Ibid.*)

Hitler reflects for several minutes. All the others around him remain silent. Dealing severely with old comrades from the early fighting days is rending his feelings. „I was filled with respectful admiration,” Paul Joseph Goebbels will later relate, „a witness to that silence, for that man upon whom rested the responsibility for the fate of millions of human beings and whom I saw in the process of weighing a painful choice. On the one hand the peace and tranquility of Germany, on the other those men who up to now had been his intimate friends.” (Brissaud, *op. oil.*, p. 201). „However far they’ve gone astray, they are fighting comrades. For years they have shared the same anxieties, the same hopes, and it is with horror that he finds himself

forced to be severe with them." (*Ibid*).

„It caused me a great deal of pain,“ Hitler admitted. But when it is necessary, a leader must rise above his attachments. Hitler is going to anticipate the meeting called by Röhm and get there before anyone else. He will not saddle anyone else with the dangerous mission. He will go himself. Six persons in all will accompany him, with Goebbels sticking close to his chief.

At Godesberg, Hitler's personal plane is damaged. Happily for him because at the Munich airfield they were lying in wait for his plane. A replacement Junkers is brought out, and they climb into the black sky still marked by the storm. Hitler does not say a word during the two hours in the air. Will he still be alive this very evening? He is an old soldier, and he will hurl himself straight at the obstacle, as he did at the front in Flanders and at Artois. He still had time before the plane took off to receive a telephone message from the *Gauleiter* of Munich, Wagner: „11:45 p.m. Several hundred SA men have gone through the streets shouting abusive slogans against Hitler and the Reichswehr and chanting their song: 'Sharpen your long knives on the edge of the sidewalk'.”

Leaping hastily from his Junkers at Munich, Hitler immediately goes up to the two SA generals there to meet Röhm in the afternoon and tears the silver leaves from their collars. Immediately afterward he sets off by car for the village of Wiessee, where Röhm is staying. With him in the car are Goebbels, Otto Dietrich – his press attaché – and three bodyguards.

A truck carrying some SS men overtakes them on the way. „*Mein Führer*,“ Goebbels says, „the one who strikes first holds the winning hand. The first round in a fight is always decisive.“ To strike before anyone else is precisely what Hitler has in mind. As a true fighter, he is going to pounce.

The tension between Hitler and Röhm had been building for quite a while. At last it was to reach its deadly climax on June 30, 1934. Adolf Hitler is first to leap from the car onto the porch of the Hanselbauer boardinghouse, where Ernst Röhm and his staff are sleeping. It will only take a few seconds from start to finish. The entry door is sent flying. Hitler rushes in. Goebbels and the few SS of the escort run from room to room and burst in before a single sleeper can budge. And what sleepers. The most inveterate of Röhm's accomplices, Heinz, who had paraded with him so arrogantly at Breslau just a while ago leading nearly 100,000 SS members, is still sleeping, stark naked, clinging to his chauffeur. He tries to seize a revolver, is dumbfounded. It has been Hitler's wish that he arrests Röhm personally.

„Alone and without any weapons,“ wrote Churchill admiringly, „Hitler mounted the staircase and entered Röhm's room.“ (Churchill, *L'arage approche* [„The

Storm Approaches”], p. 100). Röhm’s face turned crimson at the sight of Hitler, his features still more marked by the drinking bout of the previous night. He was dragged outside and shoved into a truck with several other survivors. Hitler turned away from him as though dismayed.

Suddenly then, there appeared a series of cars arriving at Wiessee with a first lot of the principal SA commanders coming to Röhm’s meeting. Hitler rushed into the road, stopped the vehicles and then personally arrested those of the leaders whose complicity was known to him. He knew precisely who Röhm’s confederates were and who were the ones not informed, and the latter were released immediately. The others soon found themselves in the Munich prison. Benoist-Méchin has revealed:

These latter had intended to let the other officers in on their plans during the course of the Wiessee conference, thus confronting them with *a fait accompli*, since the action was to begin at almost the same time in Berlin and in Munich. Those who could not be won over to Röhm’s side would have been arrested and handed over to the commando shock troops. (Benoist-Méchin, *op. cit.*, vol. ID, p. 197).

It is not hard to guess what the commandos would have done with them.

Just at that moment (at 7:45 a.m.) the commando shock troops especially created by Röhm were also arriving, transported by a column of trucks. That irruption of commandos at such an early morning hour was revealing. If the shock troops were getting here that early, it could only mean they had received orders at dawn for the very special mission that Röhm intended to assign them. And for the second time it was the Führer himself who then and there went to intervene.

„Hitler, still without weapons, advances toward the detachment commander and orders him, in a tone brooking no answer, to turn around and go back to his quarters. The detachment commander complies, and the column of trucks goes off back in the direction of Munich.” (*Ibid.*)

Thus at every stage it was Hitler who braved the risks and put his own life on the line. Churchill has written: „If Hitler had arrived an hour later, or the others an hour sooner, history would have taken a different turn.” (Churchill, *op. cit.*, pp. 100 f).

Other SA bigwigs were due to arrive in Munich by train. The moment they got off, they were arrested one after the other right at the station. When Hitler got back to the „Brown House” at 11 o’clock in the morning, he had the list of prisoners sent to him immediately. There were 200. He himself checked off on the sheet the names of the leaders most implicated, to be shot. Not there either did he try to saddle someone

else with the decision and the execution order. He took his responsibilities to his country very seriously. Churchill himself would be obliged to recognize the fact: „By his prompt and ruthless action he had ensured his position and no doubt, saved his life. That ‘Night of the Long Knives,’ as it was called, had preserved the unity of National Socialist Germany.” (*Ibid.*) the afternoon of that same day, the SA commanders checked off on the list were brought to face firing squads. „It is the will of the Führer. *Heil Hitler!* Ready. Aim. Fire!”

That took place at exactly 5 o’clock in the afternoon, the hour when those executed would presumably have ended their meeting with Röhm.

And Röhm? He was still alive. Hitler was still hesitating „because of services rendered.” It was not until the next day that Hitler, mastering his personal feelings and bitterness, would accept, at Goering’s insistence, that the chief culprit finally be executed.

At that moment Hitler declared that it would be necessary to let Röhm carry out his own execution. A revolver was placed within reach of his hand. He refused to touch it Ten minutes later a burst of machinegun fire killed him in his cell. Hitler, like his friends to an almost impossible degree, received the news with dismay. „When a young SS officer hands Hitler a message telling him that Röhm has rejected suicide and has been killed, Hitler’s face grows very pale. He puts the message in his pocket. A few minutes later he withdraws to his apartment. „(Brissaud, *op. cit.*, p. 210). Hitler had an iron fist. But he couldn’t bring himself to use it on an old comrade.

Hitler had returned to Berlin by 6 o’clock in the evening of the same day. He had landed at Tempelhof without a hat, „his face as white as chalk, fatigued by a night without sleep, unshaven, offering his hand in silence to those who were waiting for him.” Goering presented him with a list; at Berlin, too, the repression had been swift and severe, harsher than at Munich. The civilians implicated had been executed at the same time as the SA commanders linked to Röhm and to Gen. Kurt von Schleicher. From the moment of receiving the watchword „hummingbird” at dawn, a column of mobile guards had joined Goering’s personal guard. Goering, like Hitler, had made them a brief speech: „It will be necessary to obey without question and to have courage, for putting someone to death is hard.”

In a flash the commanders who were in league with Röhm and Schleicher were arrested and lined up against a wall at the Lichterfelde prison. And here, too, it was the chief who made the decisions. One by one, Goering looked each prisoner in the face. This one. That one. As at Munich, he personally and on the spot stripped those most deeply involved of their rank before their execution. Gisevius, though a most notorious anti-Hitlerite, has felt it necessary to make mention of the confessions of the guilty: „Uhl is the one who affirmed, a little while before he was shot, that he had

been designated to assassinate Hitler; Balding, one of the section commanders of the SA, that he would have made an attempt against [Heinrich] Himmler." Ernst, the boozier with a dozen cars, who spent 30,000 marks per month on banquets, had been seized at the very moment when he was about to leave for the Canaries. Hardly more than a few hours, and it was all over.

Those mentioned were not the only ones to perish. At Berlin, the political center of all these intrigues, various important civilians had been mixed up in the affair. First there had been Vice Chancellor Franz von Papen, the sly schemer. That morning his arrogance rapidly diminished. Goering had personally treated him with consideration. They were colleagues. Papen was still vice chancellor.

„I very strongly advise you," Goering told him, „to stay at home and not to go out for any reason." He had immediately understood and scurried away to safety. He would stay buried at home without giving a moment's thought to his close colleagues sitting in his ministry, even those who had prepared for him the malicious text of his speech at Marburg prior to Röhm's operation.

As for what might happen to them as soon as he abandoned them at the vice-chancellery, he would pay no heed. Afterward he would never ask for a word of explanation concerning them, nor would he express a single regret. They would the that morning nevertheless. His right-hand man, Erich Klausener, had tried to flee and had been killed by two bullets fired through his half-open door. He had wanted, on leaving, to get his hat, and that had made him lose the few fatal seconds. He died with his hat on like a conscientious citizen.

Papen's own private secretary, Herbert von Bose, would fall right in the Cabinet building. Edgard Jung, Papen's chief writer, the one who had drafted his tirade of June 17 word for word, would be mowed down just like the two others. Thus, after having been abandoned heroically by Papen, the first clique was done away with.

Next it would be the turn of the Schleicher-Röhm government's future minister of industry, Gregor Strasser. He had hidden in a factory that made pharmaceutical products. He was caught there, and he was not long in being liquidated. And what of the most important of the plotters, the future chancellor of post-Hitler Germany, Gen. Schleicher? He had been the first to pay. He had not even had time to seek a refuge. He had been surprised in his office and shot down dead before he could utter a cry. His wife, who had flung herself upon him, had died bravely under the same hail of bullets.

Always when such things happen, over-excitabile people go too far or indulge their darker instincts, and in the violence of the brawl, some innocent people did get

hurt. These casualties are what today we chastely call „regrettable mistakes.“ More than one occurred on June 30, 1934. A peaceable professor named Schmit was confused with one of the conspirators of the SA: they both bore the same surname and first name. [According to William Schirer in *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, the innocent man was Dr. Willi Schmidt. The local SA leader was named Willi Schmidt SA leader Willi Schmidt had in the meantime been arrested by another SS detachment and shot. – Ed.]

Victim of another mistake was an old and good friend of Hitler's, Father Schlemper, a former Jesuit. In the heat of such operations, where for an hour perhaps public tranquility is at stake, errors and excesses do take place: they are regrettable, condemnable and, no matter what one does, inevitable.

In August and September of 1944, one Charles de Gaulle would show very little concern when his partisan thugs, with abominable refinements of cruelty, assassinated tens of thousands of Frenchmen (104,000 according to official U.S. figures) quite simply because their ideas of what was good for France differed from his. And among all the killers of 1944, Communist and Gaullist alike, not a single one, not even of those caught red-handed in the worst excesses, would ever be the object of sanction. The same is true of Belgium, where the assassins who freely massacred, in isolated villages, hundreds of parents and children of the Volunteers of the Eastern Front, would without exception enjoy total immunity from punishment in 1945; indeed, they would receive pensions, would be decorated.

If Hitler was forced to act severely on June 30, 1934, he had brought himself to it not a moment too soon. He might easily have been forestalled that day by the Röhms and the Schleichers. His indecision during May and June very nearly proved fatal. From the moment he became aware that mistakes or abuses had been committed, he took action with equal severity against the police or militiamen who had committed them. Three such were shot that same evening, „I shall order punishment,“ he exclaimed, „for those who have committed excesses. I most emphatically forbid any new acts of repression.“

In his book, *The Storm Approaches*, Churchill would make it a point of honor to repeat – almost with admiration – the reasons that obtained with Hitler when he saw there was no other solution but to crash the imminent rebellion: „It was imperative to act with lightning speed at that most decisive of all hours, because I (Hitler) had only a few men with me.... Revolts are always put down by iron laws that are ever the same.“ Churchill, in a similar case – one may be sure – would certainly have reacted with a harshness one hundred times more implacable.

How many dead were there? There, as in everything else when it comes down to rapping Hitler, the figures tossed out have been prodigious. A thousand dead

according to some. More than a thousand dead according to others. 'The estimates as to the number of persons liquidated vary from 5,000 to 7,000 persons,' Churchill would later write, as if ashamed of having more or less praised Hitler for his energy.

What is the evidence to support such claims? None. These fantastic figures were thrown into the air to chill the blood of the great public outside of Germany. For the warmongering press that had been howling at Hitler's heels for nearly two years, it offered a great opportunity to heap opprobrium upon him, albeit with a shameless disregard of truth or even probability. That method of provocation, repeated at every turn from January of 1933 on, was infallibly conducive to the furious hatreds that degenerated into World War II in 1939.

If we stick honestly to the historically established exact figures, how many plotters or confederates fell on June 30, 1934? Seventy-seven in all, Hitler affirmed to the Reichstag. Even an enemy as impassioned as Gisevius, the ex-Gestapo member, had to admit, doubtless unwillingly: „If we are to believe the rumors, there were supposedly more than 100 men shot on that Sunday alone at Lichterfeld. But that figure is certainly exaggerated; in all probability there were no more than 40.”(Gisevius, *op. cit.*, 196). Well, there was no other day of execution but „that Sunday.” Recapitulating all the names he was able to collect throughout the entire Reich, Gisevius arrived at 90 men executed. Moreover, he further adds: „supposing the figure to be exact”(*Ibid.*)

And the other 910 ... or 6,830 ... whose execution was trumpeted around the planet by the Churchills or junior Churchills? Gisevius, who was on the spot and had anti-Nazi informers all about, didn't arrive at a hundredth of Churchill's figure, and he had only this pitiful explanation to offer: „Those who had been listed as dead turned up again at the end of a few weeks.”

In a few hours, and at a price that when all is said and done was not very high – about one death per million German citizens – Hitler had restored order to his country.

„Never was a revolution less costly and less bloody,” Goebbels would be able to say.

The anguished screams and the lies of foreign critics were the most arrant hypocrisy. What did the swift execution of a handful of mutineers on the verge of rebellion amount to alongside the wholesale slaughter perpetrated by the so-glorified *grand ancêtres* of the French Revolution?

Napoleon himself had Gen. Malet shot for conspiracy. The Due d'Enghien was killed at his order in the ditches of Vincennes. He exterminated tens of thousands of

Breton opponents in his punitive expeditions. „A political act is not judged by the victims it makes but by the evils it averts.” It was the philosopher Joseph de Maistre who said that, a century and a half before Röhm and Schleicher were executed. With undeniable personal courage, Hitler had been able to control the situation at limited cost and in a minimum of time.

It cannot be doubted that without his resolution, Germany would have fallen into chaos, and rapidly. The army would certainly have moved to block Röhm, resulting perhaps in thousands of deaths and an immediate collapse of the economic recovery. The shouts of triumph that went up abroad to see this brief outburst of violence taking place in Germany were very significant, one would imagine they were already sounding the mort.

It was not only Hitler’s right but his duty to take the red-hot iron from his forge and cauterize the canker to the bone. He did so with the force and the promptness that were needed to spare the nation anything beyond the swift and radical elimination of the corruption. He was the judge and the sword. A true leader in such hours of extreme peril must face up to things, not hesitate a second, but decide and act.

The German people understood as much even that same evening. When Hitler, his face ashen after such a tragic event, left the Tempelhof airfield at six o’clock in the evening, a group of slaters working there on a roof let out a shout: „Bravo, Adolf.” In their admiration they called him by his first name. Twice more they shouted their „Bravo, Adolf.” It was the first salute of the people on the return of the lover of justice.

A few hours later, another „Bravo, Adolf,” was going to ring out, this one still more impressive than the bravo of the slaters; it was that of the highest authority of the Reich, old Marshal von Hindenburg. That same evening, he had telegraphed the Führer from his Neudeck estate, „It appears from reports given me that you have crushed all the seditious intrigues and attempted treason. Thanks to your personal, energetic and courageous intervention, you have saved the German people from a grave peril. Let me express to you my profound gratitude and sincere esteem. Signed: von Hindenburg.”

Freed of the threat of a fratricidal subversion, the army, too, at once fell in line unanimously behind the chancellor. As soon as von Hindenburg’s message reached Berlin, the minister of national defense issued an order of the day to the Wehrmacht:

The Führer has personally attacked and crushed the rebels and traitors with the decisiveness of a soldier and with exemplary courage. The Reichswehr, as the only armed force of the nation as a whole, while remaining aloof from

internal conflicts, will express to him its recognition of his devotion and fidelity. The Führer asks us to maintain cordial relations with the new SA. Aware that we serve a common ideal, we shall be happy to do so. The state of alert is lifted throughout the entire Reich. – Signed: von Blomberg.

And the SA? No single act of resistance or complicity would be noted anywhere in the entire Reich after June 30, 1934. For almost all the SA members, it was Hitler who counted, not the men shot.

The latter had been six or seven dozen all told and were either coldly ambitious, like Schleicher, or else leftist adventurers like Röhm, as well as a few accomplices whose heads had been turned by their unwonted rise and who clamored for still more. „After all,” Gisevius would acknowledge, dealing them the unkindest cut of all, „it was only a matter there of a very tiny clique: group staff officers with their paid guards, a bunch of hoodlums such as are to be found anywhere there’s disorder or a row.” (Gisevius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 132). The bulk of the SA would not have let themselves be led disastrously astray.

The French ambassador, François-Poncet, Schleicher’s and Röhm’s old friend, would later write: „Even if Röhm and Schleicher had been able to carry out their plot, they would have failed.” Their revolt would have ended in a bloody massacre probably a hundred times more murderous than the brief repression of June 30. They had not even been able to act in good time. Gisevius would add: „The history of June 30 comes down to the choice of the opportune moment Röhm fell because he let the favorable hour slip by. The Goering-Himmler team (and Hitler, of course) won because it acted at the proper time.”

Karl Marx had said it a century earlier: „Neither nations nor women are spared when they are not on their guard.” Hitler had been on his guard. With black humor, Goering remarked: „They prepared a second revolution for the evening of June 30, but we made it instead – and against them.”

Hitler was hardly more than awake the next morning, the first of July, 1934, when continuous cheering rose up from below the windows of the chancellery. Gisevius, who at that time was not yet secretly betraying the Nazi regime, was in the chancellery when Hitler drew near to the balcony. „On this occasion,” he later noted, „I had an unexpected opportunity to see Hitler up close. He was at the famous window and had just received the ovation of the people of Berlin who had come there in throngs.”

He made a deep bow when Hitler passed in front of him, but he was consumed with fear. „Under the insistence of that Caesar-like gaze, I almost wanted to crawl into a hole.” (Gisevius, *op. cit.*, p. 68). The Caesar of the chancellery had shown guts

and a sense of strategy, and the people massed in the street below cheering him, with a sure intuition of the danger and the successful outcome, had understood.

By July 2, 1934, the whole of Germany was back on track. The SA and the army were reconciled. The political and social reunification of the Reich had been achieved in 1933. Now, at the beginning of July of 1934, military and ideological reunification were about to be realized.

Pledges of loyalty to Hitler were coming from all sides. Even the high clergy sanctimoniously followed suit. Dr. Hjalmar H. G. Schacht himself found no grounds for reproach. No more than a few days after the executions he would calmly enter the Hitler government, now purged of Röhm's presence.

On July 13, 1934, speaking before the Reichstag, with the German nation glued to its radios, Hitler assumed full responsibility for his actions:

The guilty paid a very heavy tribute: Nineteen superior officers of the SA and 31 SA commanders and members of the brown-shirt militia were shot; three SS commanders and civilians implicated in the plot suffered the same fate; 13 SA commanders and civilians lost their lives resisting arrest; three others committed suicide; five party members no longer belonging to the SA were also shot. Three SS men who had been guilty of mistreating prisoners were shot.

If anybody blames me for not having referred the guilty to the regular courts, I can only reply: It was only by decimating them that order was restored in the rebel divisions. I personally gave the order to shoot the guilty. I also gave orders to take a red-hot iron to the wound and bum to the flesh every abscess infecting our internal life and poisoning our relations with other countries. And I further gave the order to shoot down immediately any rebel who made the least attempt to resist arrest. In that hour I was responsible for the fate of the German nation, and I was thereby the supreme judge of the German people.

If there was still a saboteur remaining in the shadows, Hitler was bent on warning him that a fate like that of Schleicher and Röhm awaited him: „Any show of a plot, or complicity in a plot, will be smashed without any regard for rank or person.”

Believing that Hitler was going to be overthrown, the warmongers abroad – notably French Council President Doumergue, the vindictive and authoritarian little old Provencal – rejoiced too soon.

It was Doumergue who would be ousted from power, rejected by the French people that same year, while out of the tragedy of June 30, 1934 had come a stronger

Germany, freed of all threat of internal subversion and with the army and the SA finally brought into mutual harmony. Politically, socially, militarily and ideologically, the Germans were now a united people.

The following month, by casting tens of millions of votes in favor of Hitler for the third time, Germany was going to make known to the whole world that she was forming around her leader the most formidable unity the Reich had ever known.



This artist's conception of Hitler and Hindenburg is based upon a *Life* magazine photo of an actual public handshake that symbolized the transfer of power from the German Old guard to the new, rising forces of German National Socialism.

CHAPTER 43

A LANDSLIDE VICTORY FOR HITLER

By extraordinary luck – the luck that had long watched over his life like a star – Adolf Hitler had been able to employ his lancet at the proper time; for exactly, two months and two days after the Ernst Röhm affair, old Marshal Oskar von Hindenburg, 87 years of age, was going to die. A delay of three months, and Hitler would have been right in the middle of the civil brawl at the very tune of the succession. Every effort would then have been made by the army, by the reactionaries of the *Herrenclub*, and by other capitalist cabals to impose as Hindenburg's successor some conservative, preferably a son of Wilhelm n, who would have restored the old imperial system of pre-1918.

Hitler, who in his first months as chancellor had already had to put up with the supervision of the aged Hindenburg, a man not always easy to live with, would then have seen some socially hidebound prince or other set over him, someone wrapped up in the vainglory of his position, a copy of Victor Emmanuel of Italy hanging like a lead millstone around Mussolini's neck since the March on Rome of Oct 28, 1922. Mussolini made a mistake that day when he didn't tell the ridiculous dwarf, who was notable only for the plume which doubled his height, to go jump in the Uber. Three-fourths of Mussolini's potential would be stifled by that pompous dynastic sterility, encumbered as it was with stuffed-shirt dignitaries bespangled with honorary decorations, and where feminine grace was represented only by titled and wizened old dowagers decked out in gleaming finery. Hitler would never have tolerated such a pretentious and soul-destroying circus. The mopping up of June 30, 1934 had rid him of the palace plotters. All of them, since that date, had curled back up in their empty shells. As for von Papen, shunted aside and out of the government, he was eager to find some employment or other, even modest employment, in Hitler's service. Later he would be delighted, at the mere beckoning of a finger, to accept being sent like a diplomatic messenger boy to Vienna, then to Ankara. The public had already forgotten Hugenberg. As for Schacht, he had triumphantly taken a seat in the Führer's Cabinet while the smell of gunpowder in the ministerial offices was still making people sneeze. After two years of eager collaboration Schacht had been able to find his niche. He had carried his pro-Hitler enthusiasm to the point where he had a fabulous gold hooked cross mounted as a sparkling jewel set in rubies made for his wife. For a time he would keep quiet.

Hindenburg had been pleased at the restoration of order of June 30. The „Bohemian corporal“ was a thing of the past. He held Hitler in real esteem now.

In July the marshal had begun his final struggle. It was certain that his death would cause a very great shock in Germany. Right up to his last days, he had steered the ship of the Reich with firmness. He had passed roaring cataracts: World War I, the defeat, the 15 years of failure of the Weimar Republic. When the marshal was about to enter the shadows of senility, Hitler had pulled himself aboard in his small boat. The marshal had believed at first that Hitler was going to make them capsize, but then he had seen that he dominated and was master of the violent course of the waters, and that the old historic flag so dear to him was waving anew atop the mast.

Hindenburg became sentimentally attached to Hitler. The latter had hastened to his bedside when he lay dying. Hindenburg, no longer able to recognize faces, mistook Hitler for his ex-emperor, who had been chopping wood in Holland for more than 16 years. The flame of life still trembled on for yet a few hours. In the silence of dawn on Aug. 2, 1934, it flickered out.

Hitler did not lose an instant. There, too, as on June 30, he was going to forestall any intrigues. One scarcely had time to wonder who was going to succeed the glorious deceased when, just a few hours after his death, the *Reichsgesetzblatt* published the text of a law that cut short all vain speculation:

The duties of the president of the Reich are combined with those of the chancellor of the Reich. In consequence, all the powers and prerogatives of the president are transferred to the Führer and chancellor, Hitler. He will designate his own representative. – Berlin, the 1st of August, 1934. Ad. Hitler, Rudolf Hess, von Papen, von Neurath, Dr. Frick, Count Schwerin von Krosigk, Franz Seldte, Dr. Gurtner, von Blomberg, von Eltz, Walter Darre, Dr. Goebbels, Hermann Goering, Dr. Rust, Hjalmar Schacht.

It was signed by the 15 members of the government, including the Conservatives selected in January 1933 as prison-guards for Hitler, Baron von Neurath, Count Schwerin, von Krosigk, and even the devious von Papen, despite the fact that he was no longer a minister except theoretically, having in fact been ousted from the Council after the failed putsch. These worthy civilians in their pin-striped trousers, so standoffish the previous year, were now only too anxious to please. As for the wearers of another kind of trousers with a purple stripe, the Reichswehr top brass, they would have been able to erect a very formidable barricade on the road to succession if Hitler had not put a radical end to Reichswehr – SA conflict on June 30, 1934, and recognized the former as the exclusive armed forces.

Thus recognized, the Reichswehr from that day on had seemingly thrown in its lot with the Führer without reserve. On Aug. 2, 1934, proof would be given of the soundness of Hitler's political instincts and of his tactical skill. Without the preceding 30th of June, the triumph of Aug. 2 would doubtless not have been possible. On that

day the top generals of the army, Reichswehr Minister Gen. von Blomberg, the army chief of staff, Gen. von Fritsch, and the chief of naval operations, Adm. Raeder, were the very first to come and pay homage to Hitler and tender him an oath of allegiance much stricter than that which had bound them to Hindenburg as head of the state. For this time it was to Hitler personally that they had then and there to take an oath of loyalty:

I solemnly swear before God in all circumstances to obey Adolf Hitler, Führer of the Reich and of the German people, supreme commander of the armed forces. I pledge myself to act at all times as a brave soldier and to respect this oath even at the risk of my life.

On the same morning throughout Germany, 100,000 Reichswehr officers, noncommissioned officers and soldiers repeated that same oath with great ceremony. From then on the commander of the army, the sole commander, was Hitler. The army that was acting distrustfully a few months earlier, would from that day forward be under the orders of „the Führer of the Reich and of the German people“ who had become their commander-in-chief. every general would have to stand at attention before the Austrian ex-corporal. Said Gen. von Reichenau in a statement to the *Petit Journal* of Paris on Aug. 6, 1934:

The chancellor kept his word by nipping in the bud Röhm's attempt to merge the SA with the Reichswehr. We love him because he has truly conducted himself like a soldier. The army admires him for his personal courage, and I wholly subscribe to the words he uttered the other day: „The army can trust in me as I trust in the army.“ (Andre Brissaud, *Hitler et son Temps*, 218).

In 17 months, Hitler, who had not even been a German citizen three years before, had become the sole master of the army, as well as of Germany. Hitler, a stage-manager in the style of Wagner, organized a funeral for Hindenburg such as no emperor had known in the Reich in the course of 1,000 years. The marshal was going to be buried in the heart of a monument like an enormous fortress whose eight massive granite towers would rise in the middle of the battlefield where, on Aug. 29, 1914, Hindenburg had crushed the Russian invasion at Tannenberg. Here a few German divisions had gotten the better of several hundred thousand Slavs, who were hurled back in panic in the Masurian Lakes, where they surrendered *en masse* while their commander-in-chief, Gen. Samsonov, committed suicide. Sixty-seven million Germans listened spellbound, by radio, to the description of the long veils of crepe falling from the towers, of the coffin placed in the center of the great lawn, the hundreds of glorious banners watching over him. His oldest comrades of the Great War, led by Marshal von Mackensen, imposing in his tall, Uhlan Guard shapka, formed a square about the deceased.

Hitler advanced to face the corpse and saluted the hero who was entering on immortality: „Dead marshal, enter now Valhalla.“ Everyone held his breath. Some officers came forward, hoisted the heavy coffin to their shoulders while the *March of the Dead Warriors* from the *Twilight of the Gods* was resounding like a long, smothered sigh. At the moment when the recumbent body was deposited in the Tower of the Marshals, the booming of 101 cannon shots shook the plain, the lakes and the woods and reverberated to the furthestmost villages of the Reich, carried via radio.

Hitler, with imposing solemnity, had been at that moment the conscience of the nation saluting greatness. Hitler was and always had been anxious to act only with the consent and approval of the people: that is the historical truth. He wanted the people to ratify this increase in his power and to grant it to him in their turn. For the second time in less than eight months, he was going to trust his fate to a plebiscite in which the people would let him know their will. Already on the day before that burial worthy of ancient Rome or the return of Napoleon's ashes, Hitler had charged his minister of the Interior with the arranging of that national consultation:

It is my wish that the constitutional decision taken by the Cabinet to confer upon my person the offices exercised by the deceased president of the Reich, receives the explicit sanction of the German people.

Profoundly convinced that all sovereignty emanates from the people and must be confirmed by the people by means of a free and secret vote, I ask you to make the necessary arrangements to submit the decision of the Cabinet to the German people, so that they may pronounce on it by a referendum vote.

Whoever wished to vote would vote as he wished according to his convictions and preferences. At the time of the first plebiscite, in December 1933, it was still possible to affirm that Hitler had won it because he had based the electoral consultation on a problem of foreign policy, a subject on which the nearly unanimous agreement of the Germans was admitted in advance.

This time, on Aug. 19, 1934, it was no longer the League of Nations or disarmament the people would be pronouncing on: it would be on Hitler himself, on the increased authority that had been definitely granted him, uniting in the same hands the powers of the chancellor of the Reich and those of the chief of state that Hindenburg had exercised previously.

One could still wonder whether that extension of Hitler's power would have been approved by the deceased, whether he feared it or would have encouraged it. It was whispered that no testament of the marshal's existed. In any case the government knew nothing of it. An official statement from the chancellor's office even let it be known following the interment that „Marshal Hindenburg has left no

political testament." But one did exist not only a personal letter from Hindenburg to Hitler, but a message of seven pages preceded by a dozen noble lines in the marshal's own handwriting. The marshal had even made several alterations in the text. It ended with the holographic signature of Hindenburg written in the presence of his private advisors.

On the envelope the old man had written beautifully the following poignant note:

This is my testament to the German people and to their chancellor; this letter is to be transmitted by my son to the chancellor of the Reich. I give thanks to Providence for letting me be witness, in the evening of my life, to the hour of our national recovery. I thank all those who have contributed with a disinterested love of the fatherland to setting Germany right again. My Chancellor Adolf Hitler and his movement have taken a decisive step of far-reaching historical consequence in restoring unity to the German people without distinction either of class or profession. I know that much remains to be done. And I wish with all my heart that the great act of national resurrection and unification of the people may be crowned with a reconciliation that will embrace the entire German fatherland.

What was most extraordinary, however, was that Hitler, even though chancellor, had remained ignorant of the existence of this testament for 13 days; in fact, he had believed there was no testament right up to the moment, on Aug. 15, 1934, when the text was made known to the German people.

The marshal's son, Col. Oskar von Hindenburg – who at the beginning of January 1933 was still a professed adversary of Hitler's – had not wished to reveal the testament to the public and provoke possible violent debate before the emotion of the great man's passing had abated somewhat. He made an effort to explain over the radio to all of Germany:

My father himself, now deceased, saw in Adolf Hitler his immediate successor as supreme head of the German empire. I am thus obeying the desire of my honored father when I urge every man and woman of Germany, in the referendum of Aug. 19, to ratify the transfer of all the powers and prerogatives previously exercised by him to the person of the Führer and chancellor of the Reich.

On the very eve of the vote, the dethroned Kaiser's eldest son, whom the monarchists had hoped would succeed Hindenburg at the head of the Reich, came before the microphones and, to the surprise of many people, announced his adherence to the man that had been considered his rival: „I, too, shall vote for Adolf

Hitler," the crown prince declared.

Nonetheless, various considerations could still swing the vote the other way. The monarchists still contrived to hang on to their illusions. Moreover, although half of the unemployment problem had been solved at that date, August of 1934, Germany still counted 3 million men out of work who, when casting their ballots, might be seized by discouragement or irritation.

Finally, and above all, there was the immense army of the SA to think of. In conformity with his written promise to Secretary Anthony Eden of England, Hitler had just finished eliminating more than 2 million members and had then disallowed the remaining members the right to bear arms. So there, too, with that recent grievance preying on them, the SA members might vote „against“ in protest. The death of Röhm was also quite recent; approving Hitler with one's vote was equivalent to frankly approving Röhm's liquidation.

Unyielding monarchists, unemployed workers, SA men demobilized against their will – wouldn't they vote „no“ either by tradition, or from rancor or aversion?

All those reactions were possible. Moreover, that was partly the case. In certain former bastions of the Communists in Berlin, the „nos“ reached 30 percent of the vote; and in Breslau, Luebeck, Aachen, and Hamburg, nearly 25 percent. Proof, for a third time in less than two years, that anyone in Germany who wanted to vote against Hitler could do so freely and secretly. Yes, about 4 million Germans, making full use of their rights as voters, did indicate their opposition to the leader of National Socialism by their negative votes, while 38,362,690 others, that is to say 88.9 percent of the electorate, accorded the Führer a resounding „yes“ vote. Hindenburg, on April 10, 1932, had received 19,359,683 votes on the day of his reelection as president of the Reich, that is to say barely more than half of the 38,362,690 votes obtained by Hitler on Aug. 19, 1934.

Hitler had surpassed by 19,003,007 affirmative votes the 19,359,683 „yes“ votes obtained by his predecessor, the marshal, renowned though the latter was. The proof was complete. After the unification of the parties, the unification of the states, the unification of the classes, and the social unification, all fully carried into effect, now Hitler was just completing the military unification and the ideological unification of Germany. And a vast majority of the nation approved. It was not a country divided into 10 rival factions that followed him haltingly, as in the democracies, but a people powerfully unified.

That enormous vote, whose like no country save Germany had seen in the course of the entire century, ought to have given the foreign governments something to drink about Three months earlier, Hitler had made proposals to the English and

the French that were obviously conciliatory. They had been flatly rejected. At times, England had seemed less fanatical. On March 24, 1934, a memorandum from the Foreign Office had suggested, not without humor: „If there must be a burial, we might as well hold it while Hitler is willing to pay for the funeral services.”

But now the German referendum was going to give the British the contrary impression that they had fallen right into a swarm of wasps. On the very day of the plebiscite of Aug. 19, 1934, as if wishing to take revenge for it in advance, the British government rejected the last possibility of world disarmament: it proclaimed that Britain was renouncing entirely its inclination to disarm and was immediately going to double its air force and form 42 new squadrons.

True to his offer made to the British in March 1934 – an offer churlishly rejected by the French – Hitler had two months before, in a unilateral gesture, reduced the SA by two-thirds and disarmed the remaining third. As for his air force, at that time it was virtually nil. With that being the case, what possible rhyme or reason was there in this initiative of England’s that could only be considered by Germany as a provocation?

It must inevitably start a reaction, for if the British, instead of reducing their air force by a third, abruptly doubled it, why would the Germans be alone in not having their own air force? Why did they have to remain eternally prostrate in humiliating inferiority? The British decision, which, strictly speaking, nothing at the time justified, marked the beginning of what was to become a most appalling competition, a recrudescence of suspicions and enmities, and the artificial forming of misbegotten alliances.



On Tuesday Oct. 9, 1934, King Alexander I of Yugoslavia (left) and French Minister Louis Barthou were assassinated by radical Bulgarian nationalist Vlado Chernozemski and by the confused gunfire of their own bodyguards. Chernozemski had already conducted the assassination of several Bulgarian Communist politicians, and was considered the leading terrorist in Europe until his suicide in 1934.

After having fired off their rejection of any and all offers of disarmament in a seemingly deliberate affront to Hitler (like an uppercut to the chops), France had then for her part wasted no time: her minister of foreign affairs, Barthou, his goatee flying in the wind, had immediately rushed to Warsaw, to Prague, to Bucharest and to Belgrade, setting his nets everywhere as he fished for war.



Maurice Thorez was the leader of the French Communist Party until his death in 1964, and helped establish the Popular Front – an alliance of French Communist and left-capitalist parties – that brought Jewish leader Léon Blum to power as prime minister. After the war the Allies, at the insistence of the Soviet Union, would make Thorez a minister in the new French government.

CHAPTER 44

THE CHALLENGE TO FRENCH MARXISM

The Popular Front was going to put an end in 1936 to the French hegemony which had triumphed at Versailles on June 23, 1919. Her supremacy up to that time had been overwhelming. She had reduced Germany to dismemberment and misery, wresting millions of German citizens from their essential unity. In order to hem Germany in on the east, she had created a band of satellite countries such as the long snail of Czechoslovakia – half of whose citizens were not Czechs – and the inordinately swollen goatskin bottle of a Poland, 11 million of whose inhabitants were not Polish. These artificially manufactured states were as much as sharpened daggers poised to enter the ribs of the Germans if they should ever be seized with the ridiculous notion of holding their heads high once more.

A second line of satellite states of the French front of Central Europe reinforced the strangulation: a corrupt Romania ready to burst and a Serbia baptized Yugoslavia, in which three out of four of the inhabitants were not Serbs. That had not been enough: the pact with the USSR, approved by the French parliament on Feb. 27, 1936, was designed to further reinforce the ranks of the assailants whom Paris was very determined to hurl at Berlin in the event of a new confrontation.

To the age-old and generally unreasoned aversion of the French people to the Germans, there was going to be added a fierce social hatred that would supplement the ancient antagonism. The conflict was becoming a fight to the death between Marxism and what were called the fascisms. The latter, faced with aggression, would unite. It would be an anti-Marxist reunification of Adolf Hitler and Mussolini, adversaries up to then, extending a hand to each other and coming together in the Rome-Berlin Axis.

The Hitler of 1936 was not one of those petty politicians of Weimar who were made to stand quietly in a comer at international conferences and to whom one handed down ukases they had to receive with an air of affected gravity while their Tyrolean hats were sweeping the ground. Hitler had responded to the new threat of invasion that Paris had prepared for him in the east by reoccupying the Rhineland, his natural defense zone in the West the then French premier had immediately climbed the wall in indignation, but no one had followed him. Hitler had played out his reoccupation like a game of poker.

When confronted, the democratic regimes were weak and cowardly, the

political leaders vacillating, preoccupied every other year with elections past or upcoming. The French military leaders were representative of the regime, finical and clinging to outworn ideas of the past. The commander in chief of the French army, Gen. Gamelin, had drowned himself in additions, subtractions and multiplications ending in an accumulation of zeros. Nevertheless he had available hundreds of thousands of national and colonial soldiers. A few thousand cavalymen hacking their way with sabers would have gotten to the Rhine in five or six days. At the end of two long weeks Gamelin, abacus in hand, was still watching the arrival of Hitler's first soldiers – who were first amazed, then quickly amused – on the banks of the Saar and the Rhine.

The plebiscite – 98.8 percent of the voters for Hitler – had been the *coup de grace*.

On that day France had lost her last chance of maintaining her European supremacy. Everything that happened thereafter would be but a succession of indifferent episodes of defeat and painful recovery. Louis XIV, Napoleon and Clemenceau were no longer anything but errant phantoms in the mists of a grandiose past. If the reoccupation of the Rhineland had resulted in such a disintegration in France, it was not due just to the abulia of a Gamelin, but primarily to the anarchy of a system in which parties and government leaders climbed the political ladder on each other's backs, then fell, at a suicidal pace. In the 10 years from 1930 to 1940, France had 26 governments, one every five months.

Who could have put together any serious political plan in that epileptic scramble? On the other hand, Hitler, who had built his power on authoritarian democracy, was not dependent on a wild-eyed herd of four or five hundred bickering, wrangling parliamentarians ever at odds with each other. Thanks to Hitler's real and durable power, Germany had been able to make a formidable comeback in less than four years. The contrast of the two political systems had been striking: an extraordinary renaissance on the one hand, disintegration and disorder on the other. The coming to power in France in May of 1936 of the Popular Front, „*le Front Popu*“ or „*le Front Populaire*“ would complete the process.

Democratic succession, the object of such fervid admiration, has from the first always consisted of overturning what the predecessor has done and attempting to improvise the exact opposite. One structure collapses. Another replaces it. They come crashing down more or less rapidly in turn. Democratic succession unfailingly ends in an accumulation, ever enriched, of collapsed walls. This sacrosanct alternation in France, in 1936, was led by a Union of the Left, succeeding a Union of the Right, with both unions in fact fundamentally disunited. The Rights quickly divide into 10 rights; the Lefts into 10 lefts. They are „families,“ so to speak, in which everyone thinks only of his own electoral fiefdom, of his clique, of dirty tricks to be avoided or administered. The common denominator of all these groups, whether of the right or

the left, was powerlessness. In the normal course of events the Popular Front would not have been worse than any other. Whereas peoples are a unity – a whole – a Right or a Left is only a divisive element, artificially separating the vital forces of a nation. Partisan cosmetics change only the color; the sterility remains constant.

An additional complication at the time of the coming to power in France of the Popular Front was the international mood in which the victor emerged on May 3, 1936: 378 deputies of the so-called Left opposed to 236 deputies of the so-called Right. But above all the election had marked the triumph of the Communists: in one stroke the Moscow contingent of deputies went from 10 to 72. The pact with the Soviets that had won this brilliant victory for the Extreme Left had nevertheless been conceived by the bourgeois of the Right, by a little old trotting horse like Bar- thou; by a Laval, rich in livestock, mineral waters and radio stations; or by a great aristocrat like Flandin – all of them social conformists.

The stamp of approval they had put on Moscow had reassured the French. Why would anyone still have fears about voting for Communists when the bourgeois Right was making pacts with the USSR? The result the Communists had loomed up in the French Chamber of Deputies multiplied sevenfold. Their pressure had been evident from the very day of the election on May 3, 1936. Since Hitler's number one enemy was the USSR, it was quite natural that the latter's representatives in France should push anti-Hitlerism for all it was worth. National quarrels passed almost immediately onto the international plane. Within a month, any idea at all of a rapprochement with Hitler had become unthinkable.

Just as important as the accession of 72 Communists to the French Parliament had been the arrival in the same assembly of an important number of leftist leaders of Jewish antecedents.

Since Hitler's coming to power, the mobilization of the Jews of the entire world against him had been growing. That Hitler did not like them, no one denied. Like all Germans, he remembered the many Communist riots that had come close to destroying Germany in 1919. All of them had been organized, directed, and prosecuted by Communist leaders of Jewish extraction. It was historically undeniable. What else were the Karl Liebknechts and Rosa Luxemburgs of Berlin? What were Levine, Lewin and Axelrod of Munich? Some of these Jewish instigators had even been sent personally from Petrograd by Lenin. The memory of their crimes remained graven in the mind of every German. Teutonic anti-Semitism was not a new phenomenon. No more so than the anti-Semitism of the French at the Dreyfus Affair. Or of the English, who expelled the Jews for three centuries. Or of the Russians or the Poles, the allies of France. They had massacred hundreds of thousands of Israelites in innumerable pogroms over the course of the centuries. They had expelled several millions of them, especially in the direction of the United

States.

Right or wrong, Europe had been anti-Jewish almost since the time of the death of Christ.

In Germany as everywhere else, the Jews had had – in the words of Gen. de Gaulle – the behavior of „dominators,” taking possession, with an overly ostentatious appetite, of directing positions in business, the banks, the bar, the medical profession, the cinema, the press. One saw them everywhere, sometimes through magnifying glasses, but the anti-Jewish irritation in Germany from 1919 on was obvious. Hitler had not created it but reflected it. He had always proclaimed that in the future he would consider the Jews of Germany as resident aliens. Germany had always been the chosen country of Israelite immigrants. Many had made a fortune there. Or had at least carved themselves out a very comfortable sufficiency. They loved German culture and German ways. They were not lampooned there as in France. They were not sent to Siberia as in the USSR. And they were never nailed to bam doors as in Poland. Germany was their preferred country in Europe. Their failing had been their immoderate appetite.

Later on their chosen land would be the United States, where the 2 million Jews chased out by the czars would multiply and in two generations form the most powerful lobby in the world. But before 1933, few in number though they may have been in Germany (less than one percent of the population), Germany was far and away their preferred citadel. But Hitler, in power, threatened their custom-made racial privileges. He was shoving them more or less unceremoniously to the door. The Jewish community is tight-knit: to touch a Jew is to touch all Jews. Cut a com off the foot of an Israelite in Frankfurt, and you’ve cut a hundred thousand coms off feet in London, New York or Buenos Aires. Hitler’s elevation to the chancellorship of the Reich had thus provoked a general outcry throughout the Jewish world and a buckling on of shields equal to that of the Twelve Tribes invading the land of Canaan.

Israelite bigwigs had made fulminating declarations: „We shall unleash a spiritual and material war of the entire world against Germany,” and, „Collectively and individually the German nation is a danger for us other Jews.”

The Jewish Chronicle of May 8, 1942, would write; „We have been at war with Germany since the first day of the seizure of power by Hitler.” As early as March 24, 1933, a statement appearing in *The Daily Express* had read: „The Jewish people of the entire world declare financial and economic war on Germany.” Threats on the one hand of Hitlerian measures of „self-protection” and Israelite retaliatory thrusts on the other of „self-defense” were quickly going to create, not just in Germany but in the whole world, a climate of intransigence more and more malignant and virulent. It

would lead to the tragedies we are all familiar with.

No doubt Hitler in 1933 would have done better to put the anti-German/anti-Semitism matter aside, even as he would show himself capable of putting the damper on the anti-Polish aversion of his compatriots in order to avert a confrontation there. And even of renouncing any claim for return to the Reich of Alsace-Lorraine, of Eupen and Malmedy, and of the hundreds of thousands of Gentians of 'Drentino. No doubt, too, the Jews might have sought or accepted some conciliatory solution – that remained within the realm of the possible for several years – instead of right off calling for the annihilation of the German people, even their mass sterilization and the conversion of Germany to „pasture land” for swineherds and sowers of grain. Everyone remembers the official proposals made to this effect by the United States Jewish Cabinet member, Mr. Morgenthau. this bilateral fury would finally provoke concomitant catastrophes.

Moderation and temporization might have spared humanity these tragedies of our time, tragedies which doubtless will be followed by new tragedies in the future, for this domination/persecution cycle of the Jewish people has been going on for 20 centuries. And there's nothing to say that this perverse destiny will ever come to an end, doomed under an eternal curse to be reborn with each tide on the raging sea of mankind.

This Semite/anti-Semite problem also affected France when the Popular Front in 1936 threw her into the old racial conflict whose rancor had caused her so much turmoil through the centuries from the tune of Saint Louis. The leader of the victorious Popular Front was a Jew long known for his hatred of Hitler. Hatred so blind that three months before Hitler became chancellor, he had declared once and for all that Hitler ought to be eliminated. This Jew was named Léon Blum. He was intelligent – as so many Jews are – a Jew cultivated but decadent, with a Windsor tie, a swordfish nose, and affected mannerisms. „The circumcised hermaphrodite,” Léon Daudet would write. „Little girl,” the others said less cruelly. A strange hatred had always possessed his being. He even had a predilection for the word itself and repeated it at every turn. „I hate you,” he had screamed right in the Chamber of Deputies at his colleagues of the right. He had said of society notables: „If I were of their world, I'd hate them.”

That being the case, it is easy to see that he could not fail to hate Hitler as well. He was, moreover, surrounded by a personal team composed mostly of Jews. His right-hand man was named Blumel; his secretary-general, Moch; the editor-in-chief of his daily paper, *le Populaire*, Oreste Rosenfeld. He had named three women ministers: two of them were Jewish, That kind of progressive invasion was – and will be to the end of time – a Jewish mania. Fifty years after the Popular Front, France, with Jews representing less than 2 percent of her population, would nonetheless

have, politically, a Jewish Prime Minister (named Fabius); socially, a Jewish head of the trade unions (named Krasuski); and in religion, a Jewish archbishop at Paris, Monseigneur Lustiger (*le loustic* [wag, joker]), as if the entire clergy of France were unable to provide the archdiocese of the capital with a single competent and holy priest who was not born in a Polish ghetto.

In 1936, when appointing his predominantly Jewish team, M. Blum was following precisely in the biblical line which is 2,000 years old and will still obtain in another 2,000 years. It was still imperative for the new Jewish prime minister that before throwing his hatred in Hitler's face like a hand grenade he be able to count on a united French people. But this was not the case: the hatred that Blum owned he had for Hitler was accompanied by another hatred just as furious: his class hatred. Hitler had brought the classes together. He had remade them into a community. Blum, on the other hand, exactly like his teachers and coreligionists, Karl Marx and Engels, meant to set them against each other.

Setting the classes against each other was to destroy them: France was going to be torn to pieces by these senseless quarrels that were contrary to the most elementary economic laws. Before long the entire country would be on strike. The red flag would fly from the roofs of occupied factories, and clenched fists would be raised above heads like hammers. That would mean collapse. What industrialist would take the risk of improving his factories, buying new machinery, when industrial life faced threats on every side?

Productivity having become very bad, the price of consumer goods had shot up to 21 percent higher than British prices. The general trade deficit, which was 5.343 million francs in 1935, had almost doubled (to 10,043 million) in 1936, only to double again in 1937 (19.471 million). The production index in France fell from 100 to 81. Whereas in Germany unemployment had fallen virtually to zero, it went up in France, increasing by some 34,000 units. Retail prices in four months increased by 5.5 percent (16.5 percent in a year). The gold reserve of the Bank of France had diminished by nearly 20 percent: 52.6 billion instead of the previous 62.8 billion. M. Blum had been in power only five months when he was forced to devalue (43 milligrams of gold as the definition of the franc instead of 65.6). Blum compelled every Frenchman having more than 200 grams of gold to declare them. A regulation as ridiculous as it was futile. Gold disappeared: 612,000 kilograms of gold were lost by the Bank of France between September and December of 1936, representing ten billion francs.

„The root of the trouble is the enormous deficit of our treasury,” declared M. Jacques Rueff, one of the most highly regarded specialists in the field of monetary fluctuations.

In June of 1937 – a foregone conclusion – the specter of devaluation rose up again. The top officials responsible for the finances of France resigned. Finally, on June 21, 1937, Blum fell.

The second Popular Front government proved itself equally incapable of stemming the financial disaster. The Foreign Exchange Stabilization Fund amounted to ten billion: it didn't preserve a sou of it. The pound sterling that traded at 110.8 francs climbed to 147.2. It was impossible to halt the catastrophe. The franc would thereafter be „floating.“ the failure having become absolute, it was necessary to resort to another Popular Front government, the third in 11 months. A third time it would be necessary to devalue. From then on, the pound would be worth 175 francs. Could Blum help Hitler any better than by destroying the strength of the French people at such a pace? The anti-Hitler Blum was converted – negatively – into the number one Hitler builder-upper.

What's most amazing is that, through it all, Hitler continued to promote his idea of a reconciliation with France. He had not cold-shouldered his old Paris insulter after the latter came to power in May of 1936. Quite to the contrary, he sent Minister Schacht, a great friend of the Jew Montague, head of the Bank of England, to have a talk with him. Schacht was a pragmatist Not at all a National Socialist. But he had witnessed Hitler's irresistible rise and had been forced to recognize his extraordinary gifts, not just as a conqueror of the masses, but as a precise organizer, as a man of swift and fertile imagination, a creator who got things done. Himself an economist and banker, he had seen how in just a few years Hitler had taken a country that was ruined, devoid of hope, with 6 million unemployed languishing in misery, and made it over into a powerful community, the most powerful on the continent.

Schacht wished to please Blum but not without trying to make him understand this phenomenon: „Make no mistake, Chancellor Hitler is a man of genius.“

It cost Schacht something to confide that to Blum, because he was envious of Hitler. He had dreamed of becoming the second Hindenburg of the Reich. Hitler had eliminated his chances. But the facts being what they were, he had wished to lead Blum to support the inevitable as he did and to check Hitler by means of agreements instead of exasperating him. In vain he had proposed „a general settlement of the Franco-German conflict“ to the new French prime minister „but might as well have batted his head against the Wailing Wall.“ Schacht was personally very much a Francophile. He even composed charming poems in French. He recited some to me when, as an old man, he came to see me in my exile in Spain. But he had absolutely no success working his charm on Blum in 1936 either in verse or prose. His plan of economic collaboration was not even examined.

He just got this astounding reply of Blum's: „I am a Marxist, and I am a Jew.“ Evidently for Blum, Marxism and Semitism came before any care for France.

Former Prime Minister Joseph Caillaux, the most intelligent politician in France, had once hurled these words at Blum: „You have no soil of France on the soles of your shoes.“

Despite everything, Hitler had offered Blum – even though Blum was Jewish – to coordinate and combine the power of the reborn Germany with the ancient and so long radiant energy of the French people; but it was in vain. If only from the social point of view, the German experience could have been of real interest to any would-be reformer of the neighboring country. The lot of the worker in Germany had been entirely transformed: in salaries and wages, housing, paid leave, leisure time, vacations, family protection, the consideration of work and worker. Those reforms merited more than just a scornful rejection. But how could anyone imagine that an extreme anti-Hitler racist such as Blum would draw inspiration from or take as a pattern anything whatsoever that Hitler had done. Even if it were good. Especially if it were good.

The people of France were going to have to ignore the social transformation that was giving new life to Germany.

Any French politician who wasn't blinded by hatred ought at least to have been able to see that if 21 million German workers, among them 6 million former Communists, had come to vote *en bloc* for Hitler, freely and of their own accord, there had to be some reason for it. Normally they would have reflected and made comparisons. With Blum, comparison was absolutely forbidden. Blum's only slogan was and would invariably be: hate, though it brings the end of peace and the fall of France. For him, the Third Reich was Sodom that the avenging fire of Israel was to annihilate.



After the Saar plebiscite restored the Saarland to Germany in 1935, Germany rearmed itself and, in 1936, was able to push the French occupation forces out of the Rhineland without violent incident. Though some say this was a „violation of the Treaty of Versailles,“ the Rhineland had been occupied by the French military illegally in 1923, after Germany had proven itself unable to pay its exorbitant debts to France.

CHAPTER 45

RETURN TO THE RHINELAND

Adolf Hitler may, in his anger, have sent French Ambassador François-Poncet back to his embassy, but it was not out of any lack of esteem for him. In his view, François-Poncet was an excellent diplomat, even when his sly intrigues were at the expense of the Reich. Adolf Hitler often praised his *savoir faire*, his perfect knowledge of the German language and even the zeal with which he showered pralines on the salons of Berlin. Adolf Hitler was also appreciative of the very French charms of the ambassador's wife, upon whose grace and whose ascendant influence in German society he had often remarked. But the matter went beyond the merely personal. The low blow the French government had just dealt him was of another order entirely. The deceitful publication of an interview when it was no longer relevant or would be given a totally different meaning, was a villainy he wouldn't excuse.

Militarily, too, following the definite vote on the Franco-Russian pact, everything had changed. Now the French were teamed up with a gigantic enemy ready to waylay Germany in the East, a military enemy as in 1914, but in 1936 also a political enemy, and the bearer of a revolution that had come dose to destroying her after 1918. Now Germany's borders were no longer covered.

Eastward, East Prussia was an island, completely separated from the Reich since 1919 by the so-called Polish Corridor. To the west, on the other hand, the vast area of the Rhineland, demilitarized by the Treaty of Versailles, now lay wide open to temptation. The Rhine provinces were without defense to a depth of several hundred kilometers. Their military barracks were empty, and they lived under the threat of the enormous Maginot Line, a fabulous wall of concrete casemated for hundreds of kilometers and bristling with cannon and antitank rails.

Now that France was sure of Soviet support, Germany could at any moment be invaded across the Rhine – as Poincaré had done three times already – or even well beyond it. The French army was capable of deploying 50 divisions (she had 100 divisions) at the slightest incident.

Adolf Hitler knew this better than anyone. But he never launched his staggering blows without long reflection in solitude. After each of his dramatic actions people thought he had rushed into them in a fit of spleen, but they were mistaken. When Adolf Hitler made the decision to charge – then taking action with the swiftness of a tiger – it was only after carefully and silently weighing his chances

of bringing it off successfully.

After having dismissed Ambassador François-Poncet, he shut himself up in his office. For two days he remained alone, nibbling some tidbit or other or absentmindedly emptying a glass of milk brought him by a silent manservant, H. B. Gisevius. Then he called together the several officials he was going to charge with putting into effect the maturely calculated decision he had reached in his meditation. It was no longer a matter for discussion. With Adolf Hitler, there was never any question of discussing. At the hour of decision, when he called his people together, it was not to receive their advice; it was to give orders, to take action. A strong mind is not a ballot box. A leader is not the sum of multiple indecision.

„It is now or never that we must act,“ he said. Act how? „We are going back into the Rhineland.“ Across from Adolf Hitler, Gen. von Blomberg, who would have to run the military operation, looked at him in astonishment. He was stunned. For two minutes he said not a word. To go back into the Rhineland was to rush headlong toward an encounter with nearly a hundred French divisions – divisions that could be backed up in the east and southeast by another hundred divisions of the allies of the Little Entente. In two days or three, the Third Reich could be blown away.

What was there to oppose the enemy? Not even the equivalent of the former Reichswehr, since that had just been broken up into the form of cadres in the 36 divisions of the new Wehrmacht, which, at the beginning of March of 1936, was still only in the beginning stage of its formation. The first armored units and the first air units had just barely begun their training. Tactically, they were inoperative. „If we ran into the French army, it would be a disaster,“ the general stated. Hitler simply replied, „France will not make a move.“

He intuitively sensed great opportunities. He sensed how things would turn out. All the others were thinking that the French army – flags flying, clarions sounding, and officers prancing on their mounts – would within a week be surging through the streets of Mainz and Cologne. But Hitler, nostrils flaring, endowed like a lynx or an eagle with the special sense that dictates the moment when it is imperative to act, knew that his adversary would remain nailed to the ground like a rabbit and would not react.

An army is not just an assemblage of divisions, a heaping up of machine guns and cannon. It is also a psychological force, it is a spirit, a will, a conviction that brings plans and decisions into focus. Adolf Hitler had the visionary's gift, a thing not possessed by military men with one-track minds and a systematic opposition to innovation. „All the dangers you describe,“ he said to Blomberg – and to Schacht and von Neurath, who were there as well and petrified with emotion – would perhaps be true in the event of a reaction by the French, but actually they are illusory, for

democratic France is soft, without faith, and she will not make a move.”

Moreover, he had not summoned these men to his office to learn what they thought. Blomberg would prepare the entry of troops into the Rhineland; Neurath would give his assurance of diplomatic support for the operation; and Schacht, his financial support. „Carry out my orders and trust me for the rest” The aged Schacht, with his big round head like a hundred-year-old lion; Neurath, formal as a headwaiter; Blomberg, stiff as if he had been made to swallow his sword; there was nothing for them to do but to come to attention and withdraw without saying a word.

On the morning of March 7, although consumed with fear, they had nonetheless carried out their orders. In the greatest secrecy, the few available Wehrmacht troops had been put on trains and trucks during the night and were already *en route* to an operation of which they knew nothing.

The 600 German deputies for their part had received summons by special messenger to a meeting of the Reichstag at 10 o'clock in the morning. Not one of them knew that in a few hours a number of German battalions would be crossing the bridges of the Rhine. Adolf Hitler advanced to the rostrum. His face was like marble. Only his small mustache betrayed a slight movement.

The spectators, the diplomatic corps in full force in the galleries, the press with pens poised, all were as if frozen: why this sudden convocation of the Reichstag? What announcement, what surprise would be forthcoming?

Before releasing the big news, Adolf Hitler commenced by explaining the political and moral basis of the decision he meant to reveal: „To repeated offers of friendship and peaceful assurances, France has responded with a military alliance with the Soviet Union that is directed solely and exclusively at Germany and that constitutes a violation of the Rhine Pact. From that moment on the Treaty of Locarno became meaningless and has for all practical purposes ceased to exist. The German government no longer considers itself bound by that treaty, now null and void. Henceforth it finds itself compelled to confront the new situation created by this alliance, a situation that is further aggravated by the fact that the Franco-Soviet Treaty is paired with a parallel treaty of alliance between the USSR and Czechoslovakia”

Notwithstanding the conclusion of this Franco-Czech-Soviet alliance directed specifically at Germany, Adolf Hitler wished to emphasize that he still favored a rapprochement with the West. The diplomats were all ears. What proposals of appeasement was Adolf Hitler going to offer? They were fourfold. First, he supported in advance any reciprocal nonaggression agreements with his neighbors.

Second, he supported in advance a limitation of all military air forces. Third, he offered a 25-year nonaggression pact, that is to say, a quarter of a century of peace for the entire West. And the fourth proposal? With the skill of a sleight of hand artist he brought it forth and addressed it especially to his most anxious neighbors, the French. He offered to carry out a demilitarization of both banks of the Rhine border.

That was the supreme piece of astuteness, because on the German side of the Rhine there were no forts, not even earthworks, facing Alsace. But on the other side, contrarily, the French had for the past 10 years been devoting all their financial resources to the building – and it had just been brought to completion – of the fantastic Maginot Line. If they both demilitarized the Rhine, the Germans strictly speaking would not be demilitarizing anything, since for the past 17 years, that is since the Treaty of Versailles, the Rhineland had to be completely demilitarized. The French army on the other hand, in the event of a demilitarization of both banks of the Rhine, would be brought back behind their formidable fortifications sitting there between vineyards and turnip fields.

To cloak his offer in arguments that were typically French, the adroit Adolf Hitler was there renewing an exact proposal made by French Prime Minister Viviani at the end of July 1914. Adolf Hitler was proposing to the French what they themselves had proposed earlier to the Germans.

But – if he was being understood – if Adolf Hitler was offering disarmament of some kilometers of the Rhine opposite Strasbourg, on one bank as well as on the other, did that mean he regarded Germany as already being back on the right bank? That was close to dead right. With the growing threat of being strangled – France having allied herself with the Soviets – Adolf Hitler considered that the western border could no longer remain wide open. By signing the Franco-Soviet pact aimed at him, they had given him a magnificent excuse. Like a cat, he jumped on it. And for the final dramatic effect: „By virtue of the inalienable right every people possesses of guaranteeing its borders and of safeguarding its means of defense, the German government has reestablished, as of this date, the full and complete sovereignty of the Reich over the demilitarized zone of the Rhine. As I speak to you at this historic moment German troops have just entered the western provinces of the Reich in order to occupy their peacetime garrisons,” Hitler stated. The 600 German deputies at that moment came bolt upright as though a fantastic spring had hurled them out of their chairs.

Adolf Hitler, on the rostrum, could say no more. The American reporter, William Shirer, who was present at the session of the Reichstag, telegraphed his paper an hour later: „He can go no farther. The deputies rise, they’re shouting, cheering madly, their eyes ablaze, their faces transfigured in a kind of delirium.”

After interminable cheering, the session ended in a tumult the commotion was fantastic. One man alone went out, taut with anxiety, his face contorted. „I bumped into Gen. von Blomberg,” the American reporter adds. „He looked livid, his cheeks twitching uncontrollably.“

The Rubicon, which is to say the Rhine, had just been crossed. At 12:50 sharp, a captain on horseback had appeared on the great Cologne bridge. He was followed by a battalion that had hastily detrained. Their appearance seemed unbelievable to the whole town. The troops moved into the streets. A flight of Goering's aircraft had swept across the sky. Then a second. Then a third. Then it was really true. They were there. People came pouring out of the houses. They were running in all directions, sheaves of roses and carnations filling their arms. Artillery had followed. Then some motorized troops. And even a few deafening tanks, likely all that Germany possessed in 1935.

It is a Frenchman, the historian Benoist-Méchin, who has best described-better than any German – that great occasion:

The great bell of the cathedral is set in motion, mingling the clamor of the bronze with the throbbing of the motors. In less than an hour the whole town of Cologne is transformed into a sea of flags. The people frantically cheer the troops parading in the post office square. Girls are throwing flowers to the officers and to the soldiers. The anxious tension of the first minutes is succeeded now by delirious enthusiasm. „At the same moment, identical scenes are taking place all over the Rhineland. At Cologne, at Koblenz, at Mainz, at Mannheim, the bridges resound with the cadence of the soldiers. Eighteen years ago, in the foggy half-light of November, these same bridges vibrated beneath the dismal tread of the western armies coming back from the front, defeated and harassed. With difficulty though in good order, the men came on, clad in patched tunics, their eyes filled with tragic despair, carrying their useless rifles and supporting their comrades with bloody feet Now the movement is in the opposite direction and in the radiant clarity of a spring day. The soldiers parading are young recruits of the class of 1914. They have new uniforms and equipment, and in their eyes burns an ardent resolve.

All that is impressive. But what is France's reaction going to be? In Paris, they went directly from stupefaction to fury. It was still only two o'clock in the afternoon, and the first German officer had crossed the Cologne bridge only 70 minutes ago, when the French prime minister, Maurice Sarraut, had a radio microphone in his hand. With his two big eyes staring out of his head and dark circles underneath, he blinked his eyelids feverishly like an owl.

„Germany,” he cried, „has just reoccupied the left bank of the Rhine! I solemnly

declare: France will never negotiate with Germany as long as Strasbourg is within range of German artillery.“

But apart from these warlike exclamations, was there really going to be war? For a few hours, everything led to that belief. The units that garrisoned the French eastern border had immediately been sent on full alert to occupy their combat positions on the Maginot Line. North African divisions – were „darkies“ [blacks and colonial immigrants] going to be seen on the Rhine again? – had received orders to come up from the south, where they were in garrison, to the German border. That same afternoon, Prime Minister Sarraut, even though he was more or less on his way out of office, had called a meeting of his military ministers. Because in France there was not just one responsible official, as with the Wehrmacht. There were three of them: Gen. Maurin, minister of war; M. Marcel Déat, minister of the air force; M. François Pietri, minister of the navy; and even a fourth minister in disguise, the chief of the General Staff, Gen. Gamelin.

A famous old Englishman had once said: „The question is not to know if one general is better than another, but if one general is worth more than two.“ In Paris, there were four military chiefs. The prime minister, who supervised them and would have to bear with their disputes and contradictions, was himself ignorant even of what active military forces France had at her disposal – a thing unheard of, especially at such a time. Whereas someone like Adolf Hitler knew his military capabilities right down to the last artillery echelon, and had only to give his orders to a single responsible official, in Paris the prime minister was incapable of dictating a plan of action and did not even know what military forces his country had available.

On that afternoon he could only humbly ask his quarter-powered superchiefs for information. „Well, then, where do we stand?“ he asked his chief of the general staff and the three ministers. As if he himself should not be first and foremost the one to know. „What measures must we take in response to the provocation of the Germans?“ In a week Adolf Hitler had worked out, prepared, settled and ordered his plan of action, and methodically sent the advance troops on their way. Sarraut had been plenty vocal on the radio, but he did not have any idea of what he was going to do or even of what he could do. And he would be knocked for a loop when his four eminent warriors explained that they were far from being in a fit state to engage in combat.

The official text of the dialogue is dumbfounding, so clearly does it reveal ignorance on the one hand and faintheartedness on the other. Sarraut: „What is the army’s situation, and how much time will we need to go into action?“

Gen. Ganielin: “To proceed beyond the Maginot Line would not be in the country’s interest.”

Sarraut, falling back on a last resort: „Couldn't we at least recover the Saar by sending in a few light units?"

Ganielin: „Without support by several regular divisions it would be very risky."

Sarraut: „What's to stop us from doing that?"

Ganielin: „Just calling back the soldiers on leave won't give us enough nien. We'll have to decree a general mobilization."

In every general staff in the world, all manner of solutions, both offensive and defensive, are anticipated well ahead of time. France had always used every means at her disposal whenever it was a question of a lapse on Germany's part or of teaching Germany a lesson. But in 18 years she had never had to deal with any measures of reprisal or intimidation. A few thousand soldiers of the Wehrmacht had begun to march and the whole of France had to be mobilized.

That was the only solution that the four great professionals of the military could offer their prime minister – himself totally ignorant of the military capabilities of their country. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia – whose armaments France had provided and supervised – had all promised in case of an alert to support the foster-fatherland at once. Each of them had an army infinitely larger than the Wehrmacht in 1935. But that was not enough, Gen. Gamelin would not take the risk of accepting their offers of service, although Poland had communicated her offer to Paris that very day.

The European allies of France would not forget her apathy. They had seen that France would not even run the risk of taking up arms when her direct interests were at stake. Why then would she do it for others? At best, France would not be disposed to run any risks except insofar as Great Britain should decide to share them. Well, for a second disappointment (an enormous disappointment), the British had not been particularly shocked by the reentry of the Germans into their Rhineland provinces. They thought it was rather to be expected. The most stubborn of Germany's foes in 1918, Lloyd George, a signatory of the Versailles Treaty, had even stated: „As I see it, there had been provocation." What provocation? It was evident that for Lloyd George, that provocation was the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact. England had received that with extreme suspicion. For the British, the return of the German army to Koeln and Trier was not much of a shock.

For Prime Minister Baldwin, „Germany" had purely and simply „returned to her own garden." Lord Lothian had been of the same opinion: „After all, the Germans are doing no more than recovering the back yard *of* their own house."

The British press had shown no sign of astonishment either. The historian Chastenet, a member of the Institute of France, observed that all of the papers, from

the imperialist *Sunday Dispatch* to the socialist *Daily Herald*, including the sedate *Times*, and with the sole exception of the Communist *Daily Worker*, made a point of downplaying the German gesture. In the *Observer*, specializing in foreign policy, Garvin had gone as far as to approve of Adolf Hitler.

Lloyd George declared: „The remilitarization, if not strictly legal, appeals to me to be completely justifiable.“ Anthony Eden was no less explicit: „There wasn't one person in a thousand in England ready to risk his own skin to participate with France in any action against the reoccupation of the Rhineland by Germany.“ Although dismayed, even Churchill would admit that „these statements perhaps expressed the opinion of the British people.“

So then, what about Sarraut in a rage at his microphone? And Strasbourg under Adolf Hitler's big guns? And the Saar that ought to have been immediately reoccupied? And Gamelin with his little rabbit eyes.... Was England really going to drop France when Adolf Hitler's fifes and the diocesan bells were sounding from one end to the other of the ancient fief of Napoleon and Poincaré?



Considered a bit of a dandy, Anthony Eden was a warmongering British politician who helped drive the British Empire into its self-destructive and suicidal war with Germany in 1939. He resigned from the British government in 1938 to protest the British policy of peace in Europe, and only returned in 1940 when Britain had committed itself to war. Eden remained in positions of influence in the British government after the war.

CHAPTER 46

THE LONDON-PARIS DISAGREEMENT

The thing that most interested the British – far more than the matter of knowing whether the Germans did or did not have the right to go back into their Rhineland provinces – was Adolf Hitler's threefold offer: the reduction in aerial armament; the negotiation of a nonaggression agreement; and, above all, the signing of a 25-year mutual peace pact.

France had instantly rejected the whole package; as far as she was concerned, no one but the *poilus* had any right to carry arms in the Rhineland. England had taken an obvious interest in the German plan, and she did not intend that it should once again be refused discussion. Lord Philip Snowden, Great Britain's most energetic delegate in the International Conferences, let that be known categorically: „Adolf Hitler's previous peace proposals might have been ignored, but the people of England would not allow this last offer to be shunted aside as well.”

France was quite conversant with the state of mind of the British. Great Britain had previously informed M. Laval in no uncertain terms, well before the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact, that she strenuously objected to it. Likewise, on March 7, 1936, the day of the German army's return to the Rhineland, she had hurriedly ordered her ambassador in Paris to see the outgoing president of the council, M. Sarraut, at once to warn him and to request that in any case the French government not take „any military measures without first asking Great Britain's advice.” The warning could scarcely have been more direct.

M. Flandin, president of the new French government, had called a meeting in Paris for the next day with the British secretaries Eden and Halifax, as well as the Belgian Prime Minister Van Zeeland and the Italian representative, Signor Cerutti.

Minister Flandin first tried to impress his guests with a few startling announcements: „We ourselves are sufficiently well armed to force the German army to evacuate the territory it has occupied in violation of the treaties. It is a flagrant violation. France has an incontestable right to take action. To respect the desire of Great Britain, France has informed the League of Nations so that the Council may take note of the breach with the least possible delay. But at the same time France has taken and is going to take military measures preparatory to the intervention which she considers indispensable. France does not propose to act solely to ensure her own safety, but to guarantee the territorial clauses of the Treaty of Versailles in future.”

But England had just finished shattering the Versailles Treaty a few months earlier, on the day she had signed her naval agreement with Adolf Hitler. To speak of this dead and buried treaty again, to take it out of its moldy coffin could not help but irritate the British. „Language of that kind,” noted M. Benoist-Méchin, „is exactly what England does not wish to hear.”

M. Flandin's *rodomontades* were succeeded by icy admonishments on the part of the two Englishmen. Secretary Eden: „I have been commissioned by the British government to urge the French government to take no action with regard to Germany that may create a danger of war.”

Lord Halifax said, „The litigation created by the reoccupation of the Rhineland must be settled by negotiation; his majesty's government is ready to assume the role of mediator. Furthermore, Chancellor Adolf Hitler has made a number of proposals, some of which at least are worth considering. No decision should be made before the meeting of the League of Nations Council, whose intervention is considered indispensable both by the Parliament and by British public opinion.” As Churchill wrote, „their English allies did not hesitate to dissuade them from taking any action.” They were no longer possible collaborators; they were icebergs.

Even the Belgian prime minister and the Italian delegate as well expressed themselves in an equally frigid manner. Flandin, in desperation, embarked on a humble entreaty he thought might arouse British pride: „If England acts, she can take over the leadership of Europe.” It was in vain. „Anthony Eden, the British foreign secretary,” Sorbonne professor Pierre Renouvin reports, „urges the French government to 'stay cool' and to take no 'irreparable' initiatives.” On the 9th of March, in the House of Commons, the same statesman declares that the „reoccupation of the Rhineland, an inexcusable act to the extent that it repudiates promises freely given (those of Locarno), does not, however, imply any threat of hostilities, since the German chancellor offers to conclude a pact of nonaggression; and the British Cabinet is therefore of the opinion that there is reason to examine this German offer.” The leader of the Liberal opposition expresses the same opinion and remarks that the German initiative is not „an act of aggression against the territory of any state.”

Some years later Churchill would again recall the state of mind of his compatriots, the „easygoing English,” as he called them: „After all, the Germans only went back into a land that was their own. What should we say, for example, if we had been banned from Yorkshire for 10 or 15 years?”

The exaggerations, too, had resulted in mistrust. The Paris press, fairly raving, had announced that German soldiers had entered the Rhineland by the tens of thousands. The figure of 35,000 was specified. Some even spoke of 60,000 men. The

public saw them already smashing their way into France. As a matter of fact, the 35,000 or 60,000 Germans with shining bayonets were only four battalions that first day. And it was not daggers they were clenching in their teeth, but daisies that had been thrown to them by the girls of Trier and Koblenz. All the rest was just journalistic bunkum.

Once it was over Adolf Hitler would confess, „The 48 hours that followed the entry of the troops into the Rhineland were the most trying of my life. If the French had sent their troops marching into the Rhineland at that moment, we'd have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs, because the military resources we had at our disposal wouldn't have allowed us to show even a semblance of resistance.”

This increasing of the number of German soldiers a hundredfold by the foreign press had played right into Adolf Hitler's hand. It had at once so upset and alarmed the Gamelins and other bold fellows who, facing the awful waves of tens of thousands of invaders, had been obliged to proclaim they could not hold out against them without a general mobilization. Adolf Hitler, self-confident, scoffed to see such panic, and in order to accentuate it, he dispatched additional relief divisions – verbally. „What would have happened,” he later said, „if someone other than myself had been at the head of the Reich? Anyone else would have lost his head. I was obliged to lie, and I was saved by my unshakable stubbornness and self-assurance. I threatened to send six more divisions into the Rhineland unless we had a detente. In truth, I had no more than four brigades.”

The only other possibility available to France rested with the League of Nations conference that had been called for by the British and was due to take place in London on the 17th of March. President Paul Etienne Flandin, to be sure, had to make up his mind to attend. The first English daily put into his hands at the embassy was the *Times*. The lead article had a promising headline: „A Chance to Rebuild”; but that chance was the opposite of everything that a Frenchman might hope for. The special correspondent of *L'Oeuvre* who accompanied M. Flandin would later write: „We no sooner arrive in London than I am thunderstruck at the wave of anti-French feeling surging through the capital. At the House of Commons, where I go the next day, it is considered good form to be 'anti-French.' Everyone is anti-French, even the Labour members. In the Strand, the cars going by are carrying big posters saying: 'Germany wants peace, let France make the best of it.' ” It had come to the point of deliberate affronts: „France today stands alone,” the journalist adds, „and the British attitude is such that some French delegates are refusing invitations to the homes of members of Parliament or English industrialists.”

Was there no one in London to whom M. Flandin could turn? He had tried in vain to convince the chancellor of the exchequer, Mr. Neville Chamberlain, who everyone in London knew was going to become the head of the government Mr.

Chamberlain had sad, watery, bulging eyes. Sad, too, was his long nose and his lichen mustache. He felt powerless. Parliament and the public were opposed to any armed intervention. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, already on his way out, could only repeat to his French colleague Flandin in a most courteous way, „I am able to interpret precisely the opinions of the British people. And what these people want is peace.”

M. Flandin was just flogging a dead horse. How were they to dispose of the body? For 17 years the League of Nations had been well-known as a funeral parlor. And it was now going to organize a discreet interment that would take place in the course of the London session over a period of four days, from the 14th to the 18th of March, 1936. A few noble orations would be pronounced at the court of St James. But on the 14th of March the German generals had already for a week been drinking a very dry white wine in the well-ordered inns of the Rhine and the Moselle. For four days the international delegates chattered and dozed under the chairmanship of an Australian who was evidently extremely preoccupied with the idea that a Prussian with a rifle could be within 10 kilometers of the bell tower of the Strasbourg cathedral.

To allay the bitterness of the potion that France would have to swallow, Secretary Eden had made a final effort aimed at getting Germany to accept „having its reoccupation preserve a symbolic character.” Adolf Hitler had responded with disdainful humor: „There’s charming neighbors for you; they would forbid me to bolt my door.”

Finally, on the last day of the League of Nations session, Mr. Eden uttered a disenchanting verdict: ‘This action does not represent an action against peace and does not require the direct countermeasures provided in certain cases by the Treaty of Locarno. No doubt the reoccupation of the Rhineland compromises the power of France; but it does not in any way compromise her security.’ The Soviet delegate, Mr. Litvinov, his head hidden behind an issue of the *Times*, had not bothered to listen. „A totally futile statement,” murmured M. Benoist-Méchin, „because Adolf Hitler is not called on to withdraw his troops. There is no question either of military intervention, or of reprisals, or of sanctions of any kind. On the contrary. Germany expected a condemnation; she obtained a satisfactory report.”

Herr von Ribbentrop had not scrupled to attend the mourning of all these democratic relations. And since everybody had spoken – to no purpose – he, too, before the end of the funeral ceremony, was going to speak, but this time to say something. He availed himself of this international tribune to make another official statement, this one not futile:

Chancellor Adolf Hitler has formulated a series of proposals in favor of

peace. They have been disregarded. He proposed a general disarmament It was turned down. He proposed arming on a parity basis of armies of 200,000 men. It was turned down. He proposed to raise the number to 300,000 men. It was turned down.

He proposed an air agreement It was turned down. In his speech of May 21, 1935, he proposed a group of measures designed to ensure peace in Europe. Nothing of them was retained apart from arrangements relative to disarmament on the sea which have served as the basis of the Franco-German naval agreement the chancellor of the Reich has again and again repeated his offers of peace and – if I may say it here – he and all Germany hoped that the Franco-Soviet Pact would not be ratified.

When the French parliament ratified that pact, ignoring his offers and his warnings, the chancellor of the Reich, conscious of his heavy responsibilities toward the German people, drew from it the only conclusion he could draw: and he reestablished German sovereignty over all the territory of the Reich. In so doing, the German government based its action on the following facts:

1. In consequence of the unilateral action of France, the spirit and the letter of the Locarno Pact have been so radically distorted that the pact has lost its vitality.

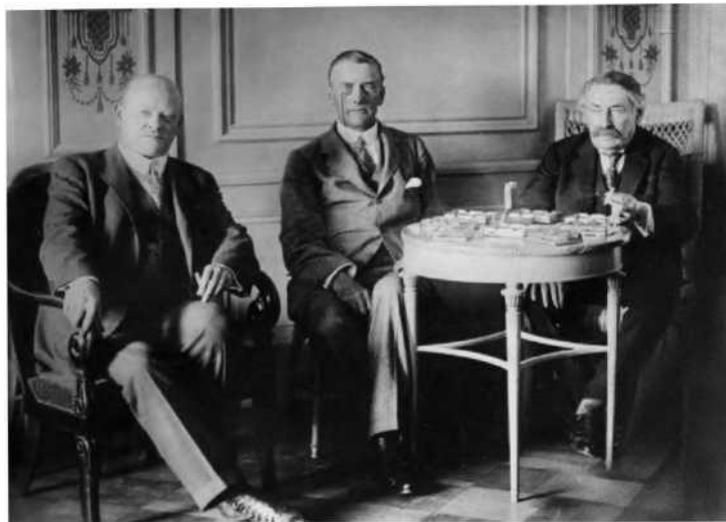
2. In consequence of the new military alliance concluded between France and the USSR, Germany was constrained to exercise without delay the elementary right every nation has of securing the safety of its own territory. That is why the government of the Reich categorically rejects as totally groundless the accusation of halting unilaterally violated the Treaty of Locarno. It is utterly impossible to violate an agreement that the actions of the other signatory have already rendered null and void.

No one breathed a word or contradicted the argument the session was concluded without further discussion. They all picked up their opera hats and made their way to the exit.

The next day the petty diplomatic game of international courtesies continued as though nothing had occurred. Secretary Eden received von Ribbentrop quite amiably in his office „to examine in what measure it would be possible to reconcile what still exists of the Treaty of Locarno.“ Prime Minister Baldwin was no less complaisant. He thought it opportune, on the 24th of March, to invite Ambassador von Ribbentrop to lunch. The accused had been transformed into an honored guest.

At that same time in the Rhineland itself, immense ecstatic crowds of people

waving sheaves of flowers were cheering Adolf Hitler, who had come to make the liberator/proprietor tour of the grounds. „The unbelievable has come to pass,” Benoist-Méchin could only note, „and Adolf Hitler has won. Despite the advice of his generals and the warnings of his diplomats, he engaged in a contest he had less than five chances in a hundred of carrying through successfully. And yet he won all along the line. ‘Well, generals,’ he says, ‘which of us was right? You were wrong to be pessimistic. I told you that France wouldn’t budge.’ Against all likelihood, his prediction came true.” the American anti-Nazi writer, William L Shirer, would in turn acknowledge: „It was Adolf Hitler, thanks to his nerves of steel, who saved the day.“



The Locarno Treaty legalized, in the mind of the West, the territorial gains that resulted from the French aggressions which followed the First World War, but left open the question of the exact position of the border between Germany and Poland. From left to right, Gustav Stresemann, Austen Chamberlain and Aristide Briand during the Locarno negotiations.

The cheers of just the Rhinelanders were not sufficient Adolf Hitler wanted all the German people to express their opinion not only on this matter of the return to the Rhineland, a masterpiece of his will, but on the whole of his administration since Jan. 30, 1933. The question posed to the 45,000,000 voters of the Reich encompassed everything: the liquidation of the old parties and the old federal states; the wiping out of Communism; the great social conquests; and even the Ernst Röhm affair of only a few months ago. No idle claptrap; the text submitted to the free and secret vote of all the Germans was short and comprehensive: „Do you approve of what has been accomplished by the Führer of the Reich in the course of the last three years?“

The result, on March 29, 1936, surpassed anything any European statesman had ever obtained: 44,411,911 Germans, or 98.8 percent of those voting, answered with a „yes.“ As in the preceding plebiscite, nothing could have prevented them from

voting „no“ if they had so desired. The proof is that 540,211 Germans did so vote. Only an eighth as many, however, as in the preceding year. In eight months, therefore, seven eighths of the previous opponents had been won over to Adolf Hitler. William Shirer, who had watched the electoral process with a jaundiced eye, had to admit „In my opinion, and I was able to observe the progress of the elections from one end of the Reich to the other, there is no room for doubt Adolf Hitler’s show of strength was approved by an overwhelming majority,”

In Paris, the leading light of *L’Oeuvre*, the No. 1 anti-Adolf Hitler newspaper, could only write with a waspish gloom: „One had above all the impression that France would henceforth be considered as having little importance in the international domain. She had let herself slide quietly off the stage where Germany was now going to take her place.”

That was regrettable for Europe. France had had, and ought to have kept, a position in Europe worthy of her genius and her past. But the democracy of the herd was fatal to her: nothing escaped its anarchy. Great countries cannot be maintained in order, and above all cannot be made to progress, if they have at their disposal only parliaments recruited blindly on the basis of ambition and greed, and expedient governments that no sooner born are overturned. All in all, it takes a master builder, one with great power over the people but not of the bogus kind; a man who can put together a stable and competent administration and be given time, so that he can see far and on a large scale; and who will not be sabotaged at every turn by disparate political parties mired in petty and immediate concerns.

Even intelligent men like Flandin, or cunning and clever ones like Laval, were powerless against this self-destructive system. M. Flandin would fall from power that very spring. Laval, too, would be swiftly sacked; Laval, the man of the pact recently concluded with Stalin, whose blessing ought to have saved him. The France of 1918 was collapsing. Another France was going to come on stage.

CHAPTER 47

IL DUCE DROPS IN ON THE FÜHRER

The French Prime Minister Blum's social and racial hatred was clearly meant to apply to anything near or far that might have an odor of fascism about it. After the fascism of Adolf Hitler, the other fascism that Blum was dead set on destroying was that of Mussolini and which was all the more execrable in that the Duce was a former socialist, the most talented socialist of the 20th century. Mussolini had understood in good time that Marxism, which in its latent stage is called socialism and in its virulent Communist stage – with its dogma of class warfare – led the working masses into fruitless struggles and resulted in economic anarchy and political powerlessness.

There, too, the comparison between the grandiose achievements of Mussolini's fascism and the floundering of the French Popular Front of 1936 was both striking and edifying. „If I were Italian, I would be a Fascist,” Churchill had written. Every foreign observer traveling in Italy, whatever his convictions, could not fail to recognize the magnitude of Mussolini's achievements. The Duce had given dignity to the life of the Italian people, unity and pride to the nation; and to the millennial Rome of the she-wolf, a new empire, as in the times of Augustus and Trajan.

Ever since his accession to power, Blum had pounced on the recent Ethiopian invasion, seeking sanctions by the League of Nations against Italy to punish the Duce for having undertaken, in 1935, to conquer that backward country.

For decades Italy, lacking fertile soil, had been compelled to send millions of immigrants to foreign lands, sometimes as many as 400,000-500,000 in a single year. Instead of continuing, like the former democratic politicians, to look on unconcernedly while hordes of his ill-fated compatriots, divested of everything, filled cargo ships and emigrated to the slums of New York, Caracas, or Buenos Aires, Mussolini had decided to find them land where they would finally be able to earn their bread without leaving home. It was in Ethiopia that he had decided to give the Italians the possibility of expansion. Ethiopia in 1935 was still three-quarters savage, ill governed, ill fed, corrupt and involved in the slave trade. Fifty years later, returned to its natural state, Ethiopia relapsed into the most horrible famine. A realistic socialist, Mussolini wanted to assure his people of work in something other than factory employment. He had already transformed Libya, on the other side of the Mediterranean, across from Sicily. Carrying civilization to distant shores and producing wealth and well-being, saving local populations from anarchy and hunger, was in accord with the old tradition of Rome, of the ancient Urbs, creator of

culture and economic development for centuries, from the Seine to the Ganges, from the Danube to the Nile.

What could M. Blum find to get indignant about in seeing the Italian people fighting for their bread, while ensuring that of the natives at the same time? The whole history of the people of Israel, of their kings and their prophets, had been nothing but a long series of conquests, of egoistic conquests by force, in which the conquered peoples were invariably put to the sword in the name of Jehovah, who was always ready to take the blame.

No race has ever boasted as the Jewish race has – in their holy books – of so many genocides. The rise of Israel throughout its history has ever and always been at the cost of blood, often the blood of innocents. The Bible is the most awesome dictionary ever compiled of the massacres of invaded peoples, ruled in the name of the Almighty, as if He had personally mandated a dozen tribes of Israel to hold the entire world in unquestioning submission.

And what, too, could the democratic states complain about when they had long been fat with foreign possessions?

All the great countries before Mussolini's Italy had carved out colonies and provinces for themselves with guns, as Great Britain did in Ireland or the Indies; France in Algeria or Tongking; the United States in the Antilles or Philippines, Mexico, Central America and even out in the middle of the Pacific. Italy alone, while she was sorrowfully to release millions of undernourished to the three Americas, had not had the right to find them a free space in lands until then subjected to savagery and despotism.

Authentic socialists ought to have been the first to endeavor to procure for their poor huddled masses the land that would permit them to live. The colonial system that reserved the riches of the world for a few privileged countries was the shame of the early years of the 20th century. That a handful of Belgians (less than 30,000 all told) were exclusively occupying the immense Congo, while every year half a million Italians departed desperate and hungry for inhumane metropolises, ought to have revolted every honest socialist. Social passion is valid only when it is international. But every Marxist party had egoistically arranged private hunting rights for its own individual country. The *Internationale* was only a song howled out at the end of meetings. This antisocial deviation of Marxism could only become accentuated when the aggravation of an ideological hatred was added to it. That was the case in 1935 and 1936 with Italy's popular expansion.

The Italian case would be revelatory of the fanaticism that can devour politicians once their national interests or ideological peevishness are concerned.

On Oct. 30, 1935, six months before the election of M. Blum and his Socialist Popular Front in France, Mussolini had decided to make Ethiopia – ancient possession in Africa of the mythical descendants of Solomon and the queen of Sheba of which the ancient world had often dreamed and which Strabo and Ptolemy had already inscribed in their atlases under the name of Aksum – part of the Italian *Imperium*. The history of the misfortunes of these regions had been a long one. For centuries the people there had cut each other's throats – Jewish converts, Christians, Muslims – while trafficking briskly in slaves.

Next the Portuguese had founded families there. Then they got exterminated. The Jesuits, enterprising as pirates, had settled there in turn after having converted a local kinglet. They, too, had been thrown out rather promptly. The country was crawling with *ras*, that is, with petty chiefs. In 1855, one of them named Kassa, who was not lacking in appetite, modestly proclaimed himself „king of kings.”

The capitalist West, on hearing talk of this distant land, had begun to lick its chops. The British, always in the forefront when it was a matter of self-interest, rapidly moved in. It was the time when imperialists and financiers were engaged in digging the Suez Canal at the cost of the lives of tens of thousands of the natives. Everyone wanted to set up their guns in proximity to that remunerative waterway: the French at Obock and Djibouti, and the British at Aden on the other side. The Turks had occupied Harar.

The „king of kings” at the time was named Menelik. He feared the support of the strong powers and sought the collaboration of the weak. With that principle as his point of departure, he had selected Italy, politically just out of the shell, and had given her not just the ownership of Eritrea but a protectorate over the whole of his country. The peasants of Tuscany and Calabria had no more than begun to dig and cultivate and lay out a few roads, however, when Menelik, overflowing with gratitude, ignominiously exterminated them, on the 1st of March 1898, at Aduwa. Italy would not forget that disaster. Meanwhile, the French and the English, passionate rivals, had been employing their intrigues on the road from the Nile and from Fashoda.

The last *ras*, or king of kings, Ras Tafari, is well known. In 1930 he had rebaptized himself Haile Selassie, otherwise called the negus. He played at being civilized. Thinking to attain the summit of civilization by so doing, he had appointed 30 senators and 60 deputies who did not have a thing to say about anything, but democracy had thus conquered another country. The negus turned up in Geneva at the Palace of the League of Nations wearing kilts and culottes and carrying an umbrella. The slave traffic was flourishing in his country just the same. The return from this pleasant business was excellent. The palace of the negus was crammed with treasures, notably solid gold chandeliers, each weighing 60 pounds.

The Italians, who had withdrawn from Aduwa to their neighboring colony of Eritrea, continued to keep an eye on the lands of which Urey had been dispossessed. Deprived of space, why should they not dethrone this medieval king of kings? Had not the French and the English toppled 20 sovereigns from their thrones at Tunis, Rabat, Algiers, Tananarive, in the Indies and in China, all of them just as crowned as the negus? The latter, moreover, in 1930 had just brutally crushed his tribes and scattered them to the north of the Blue Nile.

For more than 20 centuries Italy of the Caesars – and the popes – had brought civilization, order and efficiency everywhere. Mussolini ought to have been commended for wishing to take up that age-old tradition again among primitive peoples to whom the high traditions of work and culture of ancient Rome could only bring benefit.

But it could not be thought that an Italian fascism would be able to bring well-being and stability to backward, small African tribes. Fascism, be it in Addis Ababa, Rome or Berlin, could only be an accursed thing to be destroyed. In order to conciliate Mussolini, Laval, with his calculating cynicism tinged with humor, had given him a cautious go-ahead before he set his colonizing operation under way. In collaboration with the British Secretary Samuel Hoare, Laval had worked out more or less in secret an „ingenious and well-balanced“ plan of conciliation.

It kept up appearances, so dear to the hearts of the Geneva crowd. As a matter of fact, it gave Mussolini what he needed: his African territory of Eritrea would be enlarged by the addition of the Tigre region; Somalia would be doubled; Ethiopia itself would be entrusted to Italy as „a zone of colonization“ under the formal sovereignty of the negus. The negus himself was nothing. He ought just to swallow the pill and accept, Laval said to himself. „After all, it can't be helped about Ethiopia,“ the two plotters had murmured, for keeping the friendship of an anti-German Italy came before keeping the negus's slave traders in business. Laval had already drafted the text of the preamble of the motion which, in agreement with Hoare, he was going to present for the agreement of the League of Nations: „The government of the United Kingdom and the French government will use their influence at Geneva to win the acceptance of his majesty the Emperor Haile Selassie and the ratification of the League of Nations for the constitution in southern Ethiopia of a zone of economic expansion and settlement reserved to Italy.“

This intelligent plan would not get very far. Hoare had been betrayed in London by a high anti-fascist and anti-Hitler official, Sir Robert Vansittart, who had informed a Paris newspaper that was rabidly anti-Mussolini and specialized in press scandals of the Anglo-French agreement Three days later the Paris paper *L'Oeuvre* published the text of the plan and automatically torpedoed it „The circulation of the paper is rising,“ shamelessly declared the owner of the Paris daily, a man named

Raud, „and that’s all I ask.” Hoare no longer had any choice but to resign the next day. Laval resigned as well a few days later.

When Blum moved into the Palais Matignon, the seat of the presidency of the French Council of Ministers, Mussolini’s troops had entered Addis Ababa, the capital of the negus (or, more exactly, the ex-negus), a few days before. No one had imagined that in six months Italy would be able to bring off such a victory. Ethiopia was an immense country, wild and uneven, with savage mountain peaks like Mount Digna rising to more than 3,000 yards in altitude, or even to more than 4,000 yards, like Mount Gouma (4,231 yards) and Mount Dedgian (4,500 yards): obstacles worse than those Hannibal or Napoleon met in crossing the Alps. Dangerous gorges everywhere. No roads except faintly marked trails. Only one passable main road to the approaches of Addis Ababa the anti-fascist press of the whole world scoffed, depicting a Mussolini involved for years in that Ethiopian adventure about 2,500 miles from Italian territory.

It would take him six or seven years, some predicted. Others upped it to 20 years. But if it dragged on, Mussolini was lost. For all the imperialists and leftists on the planet, united by financial interests in some cases and by hatred in others, had been brought together in Geneva for the purpose of imposing sanctions on Italy pursuant to Article 12 of the Geneva Pact.

Mussolini had not had his campaign under way for more than eight days when the sanctions had been voted, on Oct. 11, 1935. If Mussolini were to take not 20 but even merely one or two years to make his way across Ethiopia, the international blockade of his country would hamstring him and force him to give up. It was a race against time that Mussolini had begun on the 3rd of October 1935, when he advanced with four columns of troops debouching from the north (Eritrea) and from the south (Somalia). At any moment he ran the risk of having the British cut the umbilical cord of the Suez Canal, the long and narrow strip of water through which all his logistical support, men, munitions, motorized equipment and provisions had to pass. To be sure, Mussolini had built up stocks on the spot and in good time. But if the war were prolonged they would be exhausted and he would not be able to renew them.

A considerable British fleet had taken a position between Italy and the African shore, ready to intervene at the first order. It was the most powerful fleet the British had ever assembled in the Mediterranean: 134 ships, more than 400,000 tons.

The Duce was going to see it through with genius. Contrary to all the laws of strategy in force in 1935, he mounted an almost totally motorized campaign. Several thousand Italian trucks had been brought to the site. And armored cars. And even 100 tanks. In this country without roads, such a deployment seemed to everyone to be mad. Without all his motorized equipment, however, Mussolini would have arrived too late and would never have been able to capture the 400,000 square miles

stretched out before him. He was nevertheless going to cross this fantastic country not just on account of his motorized troops, but because as an old descendant of the Caesars he had rediscovered a tactic dear to the Roman legions, that of opening their own roads.

His army of 500,000 men included – the world would learn it with great astonishment – 100,000 workers. Massed in veritable divisions, 100,000 common laborers and masons advanced at the head of the columns, armed with shovels, with picks, with axes and with sticks of dynamite. They would be the true conquerors in this campaign, worthy of Alexander advancing to the Indus. The hundreds of miles of roads over which the army advanced would have to be opened by these workers, blasting rock from the mountains and building highways of durable materials that would never cave in under the weight of the tanks and trucks, or the discharge of the enormous African rains that followed the oppressive tropical Sun. They had to scale mountains and at times cut roadways through at an altitude of more than 9,000 feet.

These workers had to build retaining walls sometimes hundreds of yards long and 20 yards high. These heroic men would be seen to work for 36 solid hours carrying 300 cubic yards of material on their backs to the top of the Tenneber Pass (3,150 yards in altitude) to enable the motorized column that was making a run on Addis Ababa to get through. The coinage and tenacity of the Italian workers were surely to be seen in this fabulous labor. Without their modest heroism, the Ethiopian campaign would have been impossible. But it is to the glory of Mussolini to have conceived, as an old Roman, that the mason would open the way for the warrior.

On the other hand, the Ethiopian troops were more numerous – 500,000 men – than those of Mussolini. Even more so: A million additional combatants could be mobilized on the spot by the negus. These Ethiopian natives were famous for their fury in combat. They would fight with undeniable but unmethodical courage. And mind is stronger than muscle everywhere and always. Haile Selassie had only hordes at his command. Mussolini had worked out an intelligent and inventive plan. No one would have to undergo the trial of advancing on foot. The trucks (at times 1,000 of them) carried the infantry. The dragoons and lancers were preceded by armored units forcing the way through.

The air force bombed all the centers of resistance. A perfect system of radio communication assured coordination of the units. On the other hand, the Ethiopian tribes, despite their valor, did not measure up: poorly aimed, without radio, without tanks and having only discarded planes that had been palmed off on them by English traders at a fat price. The need for an impeccable supply service had fired Mussolini's imagination: closely following the troops were columns of trucks with more than 100,000 pounds of canned goods.

A sensational innovation worthy of a movie comedy scene: in order that the troops might have fresh meat to eat, Mussolini had live bullocks and calves and pigs parachuted down to the moving columns. It was imperative to have water as well in this tropical land, and they did not count on the chance of getting it from streams. As many as 75 tank trucks at a time, carrying 75,000 quarts of water, daily accompanied the combatants. Every soldier received about a quart of fresh water every day.

The people at Geneva, totally devoid of imagination, went on interminably entangling themselves in the jumble of their sanctions while Mussolini pushed his army, at ever greater speed, toward Addis Ababa, the goal they had meant to keep him from by depriving his country of raw materials and supplies. Mussolini's speed and the almost certainty of an imminent victory by his armies quickly damped the ardor of the League of Nations anti-Fascists. The sanctions, it is true, prohibited the exportation to Italy of arms, munitions and war materiel. But if Mussolini hurried, his stocks would suffice and he would have no need of supplies from abroad.

The exportation of Italian goods to other countries had also been prohibited, to cut off all Mussolini's foreign currency fluids. But breaches were quickly opened, notably on the German side, where it was immediately felt a great advantage would be gained by pleasing the Italians and preparing an initial rapprochement. Moreover, the sanctions were oozing with hypocrisy. Ultimately the only absolute prohibition was the furnishing of aluminum to Italy: but aluminum was one thing Italy produced in great abundance.

The real sanction, the one that could have put a damper on Mussolini, had consisted in depriving Italy of petroleum. That she lacked altogether. But the United States was not a member of the League of Nations. U.S. magnates had immediately smelled big business and, because of their traffic, the sale of petroleum finally remained free. These sanctions, which in the beginning seemed made of steel, in a few months became mere *papier-mache*.

Their final result would be twofold. Mussolini, for 10 years a friend of the Allies, but disgusted by their hypocrisy and their egoism of the rich, was going to move away from them and pass over to the Adolf Hitler camp that up to then he had loathed. In the second place, compelled by the threat of the sanctions to get things in Ethiopia over with in a hurry, Mussolini had resorted to massive bombardments in order to open the way more quickly. Tens of thousands of Ethiopians had thus died who all would have survived if the Duce had been permitted to advance without haste across the chaotic country where the negus exercised but a feeble and questionable authority and where any Italian initiative could only have been beneficial. It was in the interest of all to aid Mussolini instead of heinously sabotaging his actions, as was attempted – though vainly – at Geneva.



Benito Mussolini had been an opponent of Hitler until 1935, being concerned about German expansion into Austria. However, the campaign which the Allied powers waged against Mussolini, after Italy's colonization of Ethiopia and his expansionist plans in Europe, pushed Mussolini and Italian fascism into the National Socialist camp. Here, Hitler and Mussolini ride together in 1937.

Entire regions of Ethiopia were openly hostile to the negus, such as the province of Goggiam, where the great slave razzias, a very special source of revenue of the negus's empire, were carried out. The *ras* of Goggiam detested Haile Selassie, The Italians entered his lands without firing a shot after having conquered, in heat of 108 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade, the town of Gondar and then the wonderful lake where the Blue Nile rises. Another Ethiopian *ras*, Gen. Taffari, had ventured to express his disagreement with the negus. That idyllic long of kings, the idol of so many sensitive souls at Geneva, had had the protesting *ras* flogged in the public square of Addis Ababa and afterward made to parade the streets in gaudy feminine rags.

The negus himself, so valiant when it came to use of the whip, was much less so when facing the Italian troops. Actually he had not been seen anywhere since the start of the campaign. He had remained shut up imperturbably in his palace. When, a month before the end, he finally had to make an appearance at the front, it was only to flee shamefully after a week and to run and hide in the mountains. He would reappear in Addis Ababa on May 1, 1936, only to remove his enormous fortune and embark with it and all his *smalah* [Arab chief's retinue] in a special train that would take him out of Ethiopia to Djibouti. On that day the world would get to see the people for whom the manipulators of Geneva, with their sanctions, had very nearly destroyed Italy.

Ethiopia, represented in Geneva as a marvelously democratic county, was a

country so benighted, so little civilized, that the negus had no more than cleared out before its savagery was revealed in all its crudity. From May 1, 1936, before the Italians arrived, the capital of Addis Ababa became a battlefield of killers and thieves. Historian Benoist-Méchin relates:

Anarchy and terror rule the city. The squaring of accounts among the natives and the murders are no longer counted. Everything is ransacked, pillaged and demolished, beginning with the Imperial Palace. The treasury, where there are considerable gold reserves, is the object of a regular siege, after which the pillagers kill each other over the division of the spoils.... Fearing to be massacred by the Ethiopians, the few whites living in Addis Ababa take refuge in the legations. The latter also become objectives toward which the Abyssinians turn their hatred. They have to be barricaded and converted into forts. A veritable manhunt is going on in the streets and anyone with a light complexion is savagely struck down.

Such were these darling boys of the Geneva democracies, for whom, out of hatred for Fascism, the peace of the West had been put in extreme danger; moreover, Mussolini – furious at seeing that those he had until then believed his friends had done everything to starve his country – had been thrown back into Adolf Hitler's arms.

But the topper would come in Addis Ababa. The British, who had been so dead set on voting the sanctions and demanding that Geneva prevent the Italians from reaching Addis Ababa – at the instigation of their firebrand, Secretary Eden – were now going to run to the Italians crying for help, begging them to speed up the invasion of the city and save their compatriots. Benoist-Méchin continues in his account:

On the morning of May 4, the situation has become so alarming that Sir Sidney Barton, the British minister, acting on behalf of his colleagues of the diplomatic corps, addresses an SOS to Marshal Badoglio begging him to accelerate his march on the city and occupy it as quickly as possible.

The same afternoon, very amused by the British supplication, the Italians entered the capital of the ex-negus, carrying their rifles by the sling. On May 9, their troop columns had come together throughout the territory. Rome once again possessed an empire. Mussolini had truly earned the right to mark his flags with the age-old fasces of the lictors. The democracies, after this foolishness, ought to have tried to repair the damage as soon as possible and to get the Italo-Anglo-French ship back on an even keel somehow or other. Some Britishers who were less passionate than Marxists like Blum, and for whom a fact ever and always counted for more than a lord mayor, had finally understood that they had gone completely astray. Churchill

personally admitted:

Her Majesty's Government has imprudently championed a great world cause. It has placed itself at the head of 50 nations whom it has urged on with fine words.... Its policy for a long time has been dictated by the desire to satisfy certain powerful currents of opinion that have appeared here at home rather than by concern for European realities. By alienating Italy, it has completely upset the equilibrium of the continent without obtaining the slightest advantage for Abyssinia..

England would in the end reluctantly recognize the Italian empire, but not until 1938, when it would be much too late.

As for the Marxist Blum, who ought to have been able to get well out of it, since he had not come to power until the very month in which the conquest of Ethiopia had definitely been achieved, he would continue to act as Italy's most rabid enemy. Mussolini had scarcely any illusions. When AM. Bertrand interviewed him, as he had previously interviewed Adolf Hitler, the Duce had answered: „What do you want me to say to a French journalist? You have just given yourselves a government whose principal aim is to fight against fascism. Well, go ahead and fight“

Then, gaining control of himself, he had continued: „Do you know the present French leaders well enough to give them a message?... Yes? Then tell Léon Blum that I wish to deal with France independently of his domestic administration.“ Recalling his personal role in Italy's entry into the war in 1915, he had added:

I had Italy enter the war on the side of France.... I love your country and I'll promise you something specific in exchange. Through your boasting and your weakness, you have let the Rhineland be reoccupied. The Germans are going to fortify it... By passing through the Piedmont with the assistance of the Italian army, you can go and defend Czechoslovakia and that's the only chance you have left. I shall defend Czechoslovakia with you. You will defend Austria with me. There is no other way to halt the conquest of Central Europe by Germany. Tell that to Blum. I'll sign a treaty tomorrow, if he wishes.

It is plain that despite the rebuffs and insults, Mussolini had not yet completely decided, after the conquest of Ethiopia, to go over to Adolf Hitler's side. Giving the Allies a second chance remained a possibility and Mussolini was offering a helping hand. Blum spumed it contemptuously. He would not even bother to answer by so much as the cold formality of a diplomatic rejection. He charged – that and no more – a high official of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, M. Massigli, to let Italy know the reasons which motivated his refusal. They were a masterpiece of democratic double-talk.

„There is no question but that the electoral commitments made by M. Blum to the Narbonne socialists will not allow him to take the matter under consideration.“ It’s enough to make one cry. How can there be a fanaticism so narrow-minded? The equilibrium of Europe was to be upset to please a few Narbonne voters?

However, that’s the way it would be.

Political truckling to voters hit a new high that day. And anti-fascist hatred had appeared in all its polite splendor. „The matter went no further,“ writes Benoist-Méchin in conclusion. „Nothing more was said about it“.

Far from clearing the air, as the Duce had hoped, his offer seemed to exasperate the leftist parties. The Paris press raged against him and heaped insults on him. And now at last Mussolini drew the proper lesson from this hostility.

Judging that he could not expect much from France, he replied with more and more virulent words to the attacks under which he was coming. Since France, England and the United States refused the hand he extended to them, there was nothing left for him but to turn to the only country that had offered him its help in his hour of peril. The turnabout began on the 24th and 25th of October, 1936, when Count Ciano, the Italian minister of foreign affairs, came to Berchtesgaden and to Berlin, where he proceeded to „a hill exchange of ideas“ with the Führer.

By his anti-fascist hatred, M. Blum had just let France lose an exceptionally important ally. When the hour of the *Anschluss* sounded, Paris would find the access closed to a border that had been wide open to her for 20 years.



Léon Blum, the first Jewish Prime Minister of France, was the product of the French popular front, an alliance of French communists and left-wing capitalist politicians that was formed to oppose French nationalist movements inspired by German National Socialism. Ironically, the Blum government's anti-nationalist policies to a weakening of the French military and contributed mightily to the defeat and occupation of France by the German military in 1940.

CHAPTER 48

LÉON BLUM: COLLECTOR OF FASCISMS

The Spanish *Frente Popular* had flopped economically and socially just as badly as the *Front Populaire* of France, and sooner. From 1931 to 1936, the Spanish Republic, pink at the beginning but later blood red, had shown itself to be extremely competent when it came to burning down churches (32 in a single night in Malaga) and to assassinating or having assassinated hundreds of its opponents (notably the rightist leader, Señor Calvo Sotelo). But the workers had waited in vain for Marxism to better their lot. During five years of democracy they had marked time in misery. A printer like Carillo, the future leader of the Communist Party, earned two pesetas a day, not a centimo more, on the eve of the day when Gen. Francisco Franco, tired of so much disorder, launched an assault against the „Republican“ regime, which was as talkative as a cockatoo but bloody and impotent.

From July 18, 1936, a fierce combat raged. Every Spaniard was forced into one group or the other according to the geographical division of the civil war. Brothers fought against brothers, idealists against idealists, because Spain has a noble soul and thus idealists abounded in both camps. It had taken only a year for the war of the *Frente Popular* to be transformed into a war of the USSR. As early as 1937 the tanks, planes, and the political commissars from Moscow were in control of the terrain in the republican zone.

It is false to say that Adolf Hitler from the very beginning had supported Franco. It is true that in the first month, in North Africa, Franco had received the support of 10 of Mussolini's cargo planes. But Adolf Hitler, at the beginning, had stayed out of it. Hitler was not asked for help by Franco until after the arrival in Barcelona, Valencia and Bilbao of massive shipments of arms from the USSR and from Blum's „Popular Front“ in France.

It was at Bayreuth, where he was attending the great Wagner festival, that Adolf Hitler received the first emissaries of the Spanish *Caudillo*. And it was not until after having weighed the fundamentals of the problem for several hours that he decided to grant assistance that would be of high quality, to be sure, but that always remained limited (amounting to one percent of the forces Franco had at his disposal). The recital of the atrocities committed by the Spanish Marxists (e.g. 8,600 priests and nuns massacred, tens of thousands of suspects shot without a trial, tortures worthy of Turkish janissaries), and the danger, too, of seeing a formidable military extension of the USSR installed in the southwest of Europe that would supplement the anti-Adolf

Hitler bloc of the „Popular Front“ of France, convinced Adolf Hitler to send to Franco’s Spain, a few weeks after the beginning of hostilities, a contingent of planes and tanks with their crews – a few thousand men in all. He did it calmly, as much to give training to his new forces in a real war terrain as to support an anti-Communist regime that in his view was too clerical and too conservative.

In any case, Adolf Hitler’s participation was never anything but a drop in the bucket alongside the red sea of reinforcements provided by the Soviets, by the French Marxists, and by the thousands of ruthless Communist combatants of the „International Brigades.“ It was to them that the *Frente Popular* owed having been able to survive for such a long time. From November of 1936 onward, it was this voluntary support from abroad which beyond any doubt had saved Communist Madrid. And then other, and at times very unexpected, aid and comfort had been given the *Frente Popular*. Thus we had been afforded the spectacle of Cardinal Verdier, the archbishop of Paris, supporting the Red Republic like any Pantin or Saint-Denis bruiser.

„To be sure,“ the unctuous prelate had declared, „a republican victory will deprive the Church of Spain of a few of its ancient privileges, but it will ensure it a more stable position.“

It was to Stalin’s immediate interest that the Spanish war be prolonged, that it provides the bridge to the decisive showdown between Communism and Hitlerism. For Stalin, the carnage in Spain was his own personal fight. It was for him that half a million poor devils of the Spanish left would perish. He kept the head of the *Frente Popular* above water for three years because his strategy demanded it. But not without filling his pockets liberally on the way, having Madrid entrust him with all the gold of the Bank of Spain and the jewels stolen from the private safe-deposit boxes, not a milligram of which would ever reappear. Countries were only pawns on his chessboard. He used them, one after another, or one against another, according to his needs.

He made no effort to conceal his cruel eyes with their glint of yellow. In the course of a luncheon in Paris, on Sept 8, 1936, one of his delegates had gone so far as to say sardonically to the most important Jew in France: „See here, dear M. Rothschild, we hate Germany so much that we are capable of one day allying ourselves with her to force the French and the British – who will otherwise be tempted to yield forever – to wage war against her and destroy her for us.“

It was true. It was for him and for him alone that the Europeans would later wipe each other out, from 1939 to 1945. The USSR was the great supplier to the Spanish republic of the arms and materiel that permitted the prolongation for three bloody years of horrible carnage from which Spain, whatever the result of the civil

war, could only emerge bled dry. This conflict was exactly what Stalin wanted and would last until a few months before World War II, at the end of which – with both sides exhausted – the way would be open for the Communists to rule half of Europe.

This prospect of a generalized war did not in the least frighten the „Marxist and Jew“ Léon Blum, who would have sacrificed France and all of Europe for the sake of his racial hatred. One Jew setting foot in Berlin again was of much more concern to him than the lives of 10,000 peasants from Beauce or Narbonne who, when all was said and done, were only Frenchmen. Directly or indirectly Blum provided very important amounts of materiel to the *Frente Popular*, and especially aircraft that France herself moreover dangerously lacked. Later, when it became imprudent to affront the International Supervisory Commission, he would make it possible for an enormous Soviet military traffic destined for Communist republican Spain to be carried on with a fleet that though entirely Soviet was sailing under French camouflage. Secret unloading docks were reserved for these ships in the vicinity of Bordeaux, and from there hundreds of trucks loaded with Soviet materiel left for Spain without any kind of inspection. Irrefutable revelations of this have been published by the son of the top French Communist leader, Maurice Thorez.

Gen. Gamelin himself has admitted the extensiveness of this collaboration of the Soviets, the *Front Populaire* and the *Frente Popular*. „It is certain that a great deal of materiel from various places and above all from Russia was shipped across France. Despite the existence of an International Supervisory Commission, it may be supposed that the civil authorities kept their eyes closed, no doubt in accordance with secret orders.“

That collaboration had gone well beyond the mere delivery of arms to the *Frente Popular*. Under the pretext of preventing the Germans from establishing themselves in Spain – which never entered Adolf Hitler’s mind – as well as the Italians – who despite Franco’s victory took care not to keep a single square meter of Iberian territory – quite specific plans for military intervention were drawn up by the *Front Populaire*. These plans even envisioned landings in the Balearics and in Morocco, as has been established by an official and secret record of the meeting of the Permanent Committee of National Defense held on March 16, 1938, under the chairmanship of Blum. Gen. Gamelin himself published the text of these minutes in his memoirs entitled *Seruir*.

Here is the gist of them:

Léon Blum, president of the council, says: „What would it take for us to intervene in Spain? How could we back up an ultimatum to Gen. Franco to this effect: ‘If within 24 hours you have not renounced the support of foreign forces, France will consider herself free to act and will reserve the right to take whatever

measures of intervention she judges necessary'?"

Gen. Gamelin, national defense chief of staff, replied: „If we wanted to play that game, we should need a million men. We have not anticipated a separate mobilization for the southwest”

Paul Boncour, minister of foreign affairs: „What would be the effect on Spain of an operation against Spanish Morocco? Would it be enough to rescue the government faction?”

Gen. Gamelin, again: „Such an operation would have a great effect on morale; it would put important centers in our hands.”

Thus, in order to support Spain's Communists and Soviet agents, a French general – Blum's military right hand – was ready to go to war against Morocco. Gamelin even added: „It [the operation] would require a partial mobilization of Algeria” Morocco was not enough. Gamelin and Blum were ready to mobilize the Algerians. Front Poinztaire had in mind an operation to aid *Frente Popular* on its Mediterranean seaboard.

Paul Boncour, French minister of foreign affairs, said, „What would we have to consider in an operation against the Balearics?” Vice Admiral Darlan, navy chief of staff, replied, „That would be a large-scale operation requiring land forces equivalent to a division.”

Léon Blum, president of the Council, said in addition: „Would it be possible to intensify the aid provided to Spain without military intervention?” Gen. Gamelin replied, „That would involve disarming French forces and for a very chancy result, since the [Spanish] government forces are quite incapable of managing.”

If Léon Blum's *Front Populaire* did not disembark in Morocco or the Balearics, it was not because they were not burning to join forces with the army of the *Frente Popular*; it was because in the view of the specialists of the French general staff, the Spanish republican forces were „incapable of managing.”

Daladier, minister of war, asks: „What would be Germany's reaction and Italy's in the event that we should intervene in Spain?”

And Léon Blum, president of the council: „Would they consider it a *casus belli*?”

Leger, secretary general of the ministry of foreign affairs: „Beyond the slightest doubt”.

Daladier: „Such an intervention, not motivated by any new developments,

would put us at the risk of being all alone against Germany and Italy with only so-so support from a distant and weakened Russia, and without any assurance at all of Great Britain's assistance."

These warriors were not lacking in courage. It was only their means they had doubts about.

At the end of the discussion, Gamelin delivered an official note (No. 11- D.N), which he attached to the minutes, on the subject of the consequences „of grave importance" that might be presented by the reaction of the Germans and Italians to French operations in Morocco or the Balearics.

The principal points are as follows: 1. Consequences at sea: The naval bases available to the enemy navies would have to be reckoned with. 2. Consequences in the air: Airforces based on Spanish territory would be able to undertake missions in great force and at long range. 3. Consequences on land: The possibility for our enemies of threatening the Pyrenean frontier and the concomitant need to tie up defense forces there.

It is quite clear: Gamelin and Blum did not reject any of the pro-re- publican landings in North Africa and Majorca, but just as the mere entry of three German battalions into the Rhineland in 1936 had terrified the general staff, both of them were seized with panic facing the risks that might be presented by operations in the African or European territories of Franco's Spain. The last lines of Gamelin's conclusions are especially eloquent: „It might prove insufficient merely to engage in the tactic of reprisals which would immobilize considerable manpower. Under those conditions we might eventually be led into seeking the destruction of bases by direct intervention, by means of combined operations at various points on the peninsula."

The words are there: „destruction of bases"; „direct intervention"; „combined operations." All of the quotations reproduced above are extracts from the text of the report, dated March 16, of the meeting on the preceding day, March 15, 1938, of the Permanent Committee on National Defense, and of the attached note, both signed by Gamelin himself and both reproduced *in extenso* in Gamelin's book: *Servir*, vol. II, pp. 322-331.

But how could this *Front Populaire*, that out of Marxist hatred for Franco threatened Morocco, the Balearics and even the peninsula with „landings" and „combined operations:" how could it have pursued such an aggressive policy at the risk of being militarily involved „from the Rio de Oro to the shores of the Levant"? It was not even in a position in 1936 to conduct a defensive policy. One would see it only too well in May of 1940. Using deception or provocation as a matter of policy may to some extent be justified *a posteriori* if the end results obtained are positive.

The end results of the *Frente Popular* could not help but be extremely negative. These machinations against Franco in Spain would have no more success than the intrigues against Mussolini. They would serve only to push the Duce and the *Caudillo* closer to the Third Reich. It was Blum himself who would bring about the anti-Marxist unification of the German and Italian authoritarian regimes. It was he who would boot Mussolini into Hitler's arms.

The political, social and financial disintegration that Blum had inflicted on France beginning with the month of May of 1936 had had catastrophic repercussions on the army. The production of the war materiel factories had declined substantially. The franc, which ought to have made possible the purchase abroad of wanted materiel, had crashed. Thousands of young officers were demoralized. Their leaders became the target of ever more arrogant antimilitarist intrigues. Gamelin has personally recounted, a bit appalled, an experience he had once while driving the president of the Polish state, who was visiting France at that time. „When Gen. Smigly-Rydz and I left Paris by car to go to the East, we were every so often greeted by groups of men shaking their fists at us. I wasn't at all easy about it.”

Blum was firmly determined to sabotage the negotiations at Geneva. Hatred of Adolf Hitler and Fascism came before everything else. From the first days of his victory at the polls, Blum had secretly indicated to the head of the French army that if the government determined to play the game – or the comedy – of the Geneva proceedings, it would be only a maneuver. „In reality,” as Gamelin almost ingenuously avowed, „there was sly method in that last point of view as there had been on the part of our diplomacy.

„On the one hand,” Gamelin continues, „it was imperative that the attitude taken not slow down our armament efforts. On the other hand, in putting forward the categorical stipulation of an effective international inspection, not only for disarmament but even for the limitation of armaments, that France was certain Nazi Germany would reject, there was no risk of winding up with a solution.”

„Of course.” It is perfectly clear you make a proposal in order not to come to a conclusion. „Our proposal,” Gamelin wrote finally, „was at once sincere [sic] and adroit, provided that public opinion did not take at face value what was just the game of politics.”

Would the Blums and Gamelins be able to make out a valid case for thus deceiving the French people in the event of a change of attitude on the part of the Third Reich? Whatever else may be said of the Germans of 1936, they were conciliatory *vis-a-vis* France to the point of *naïveté*. Despite the rebuff Minister Schacht had received from Blum, the „socialist and Jew,” at the time of his visit to Paris, the German minister of war, Gen. Rundstedt, had stepped into the breach, and,

in an attempt to calm the itch for warmongering that animated the *Front Populaire*, had sent the least Nazi of Germany's military men to see Gamelin: Gen. Beck, the same man who would be executed in July 1944 for having fomented the final attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Beck did everything possible to reason with Gamelin.

„I am certain,“ he told him, „that I speak for the present leadership of the Reichswehr in assuring you that we have no desire for war against you. You are convinced that you would be the victor. We think that we should be. That's the way it is with good military men. But the final outcome would in any event bring about the ruin of Europe and the end of our common civilization. Only Bolshevism would profit from it.“

Germany's military attaché in Paris, Gen. Kuehlenthal, would be no less insistent to Gamelin. „Germany and the Führer do not want war with France. Between ourselves, it is finished. There is no hatred any longer.“ He, too, had added, in virtual dismay at the thought of a new conflagration, „When Germany and France are down and out, Russia, having bided her time, will then step in.“

The historical proofs of the admission by Blum and Gamelin of their „political game“ are still in existence. They may be found, clear as crystal, in another official report of another meeting held by the Permanent National Defense Committee with Blum, the president of the council, on Saturday, May 19, 1937. It has been drafted under Order Number 418, DN3. Here are the most significant statements:

Edouard Daladier, minister of national defense: „Everyone is in agreement that French armaments are not to be reduced so long as the programs approved have not been carried out completely.“

Delbos, minister of foreign affairs: „The British government fears that our present position in support of rearmament may come to hinder rearmament if it were brought to believe that disarmament was near.“

Blum, president of the council: „It is in our interest to push this business (of fake disarmament) as much as possible without however putting it into effect“

Marshal Petain: „If limitation were proposed to Germany today, she would accept it immediately because of lire immense advantage it would give her.“

Edouard Daladier, minister of national defense and of war; „Germany has reached a level of force that she will find hard to exceed. We can catch up to her and surpass her, just as we have already done in certain points.“

Marshal Petain: „The question of limitations should not be broached until

England and we ourselves have reached our maximum.”

Léon Blum: „That is a condition *sine qua non*.“

The discussion in a nutshell: They would rearm to the limit under the „clever“ and above all remarkably hypocritical guise of an official quest for disarmament, knowing in advance – because they were firmly determined to make it so – „that it cannot result in any concrete solutions.“

The *Front Populaire*, however, would never get beyond the all-talk stage, not in 1936 nor afterward. The strikes, the occupying of factories, the drop in the hours worked and the low production in military enterprises would nullify the bellicose plans expressed so cynically in the course of these secret meetings.

Gamelin, hard pressed by the Left, indecisive, a civil servant without character, had meanwhile fallen completely into discredit Professor Pierre Renouvin wrote: „Gamelin disperses and dilutes. He feels comfortable with the vague and the uncertain.“ His closest colleagues judged him with a cruelty that is rather surprising in high military circles, where a gilded cage had always been venerated like an ostensorium.

The future Gen. Bauffre, serving on the army general staff just two steps away from the office of Gamelin, would say of the latter and of his aides: „The essential preoccupation of our commanders was the appearance of the paperwork.... The whole had just one force, that of inertia.“ Captain Zeller, who would become famous in the Resistance and become the governor of Paris, minced matters even less: „Do you know Gen. Gamelin?... Well, he’s a nincompoop.“ On the other side, Adolf Hitler’s side, colonels were 40 years old. In France they were 60. Generals were 10 years older.

Gen. Petain was born 14 years, and Gen. Weygand three years, before the war of 1870. But Marshal Goering, who put together the dreaded Luftwaffe, was just 49 years old when Blum came to power. How was France ever going to measure up if it came to war? Bragging and provocations would no longer suffice on D-Day.

For Blum, this worry was only relative. The security he counted on above everything else would surely come from Moscow. The Franco-Soviet pact would get him out of it. In the event of a brawl with Adolf Hitler, the enormous Communist masses of the East would descend on Berlin. The Czech allies would do the rest. It was sooner said than done. What, really, did these enormous armies of the USSR consist of? And how, in case of need, would they intervene?

Those were the true questions that someone responsible for the future of France

ought to have been asking from 1936 on. Blum, absorbed in his Marxist, Semitic hatred, had taken care not to raise them. Events were going to demand they be answered in full.



Mikhail Tukhachevsky was a marshal of the Soviet Union and an early Soviet Communist who had led the Soviet attack on Poland during the Bolshevik Revolution, which ended in the defeat of Soviet forces in July 1920. A rival of Stalin, he was accused of plotting with the German government against Stalin and executed in 1937 at the start of the great purge of the Soviet military. The Russian government later claimed it had executed Tukhachevsky in error as the result of false intelligence secretly provided by the German government.

CHAPTER 49

HITLER AND TUKHACHEVSKY

Adolf Hitler, analyzing Mikhail Tukhachevsky's worth, feared it just as much as did Josef Stalin. For Tukhachevsky, all by himself, because he had military genius, was a greater danger to Germany than a million *muzhiks* hurled at Koenigsberg in a herd. Without this absolutely first-class military leader, the enormous Soviet war machine might be only a scarecrow.

With Tukhachevsky in command, however, it rapidly became operational, and probably irresistible, facing a Wehrmacht that was still very vulnerable in 1936, in the very first stages of rebuilding.

Because of Tukhachevsky, Hitler's entire military structure could be snapped up in one bite and be destroyed.

Among Hitler's worries, the young Soviet marshal represented the number one danger, the only big real danger that could strike Germany in the short term. This Tukhachevsky was far more capable and formidable than a pawn of the general staff like Gamelin, who was all glitter and vanity, and so admired by the old guard of the Reichswehr.

The Russian *generalissimo* on the other hand was not wedded to outdated strategies: he saw clearly, and he saw far. He had known Germany for a long time. During World War I he had been an indomitable prisoner, escaping three times and crossing the Reich on foot at night, but recaptured each time and finally locked up in the stronghold for stubborn cases at Ingolstadt. And there he'd had as his roommate an Olympian Frenchman so long-legged he looked like the Eiffel Tower in a kept. The Russian would be in the saddle more quickly than this Frenchman, de Gaulle, who would wait 20 years before anyone took notice of his military doctrines.

The Bolshevik revolution of 1917 had offered Tukhachevsky the biggest opportunity of his life. Lenin completely lacked military cadres. And Tukhachevsky, despite the fact that his antecedents were aristocrats and he was a young officer of the czar, went swiftly over to the new regime. „Czarism is dead,” he had said, „and will live no more.” The German-Soviet peace had brought him back to Russia. Since he accepted the Red Star, he had been booted up to colonel without delay, then to colonel general. This Soviet Bonaparte had displayed tremendous talent. He was entrusted with an army group. He had defeated Kolchak in Siberia, Denikin at the Kuban. In 1920 he had even been on the point of seizing Warsaw, coming out of

Minsk like a flash of lightning. If it had not been for the jealous sabotage of Commissar Stalin, who had deprived him in the south of one of the two armies earmarked for his encirclement operation and turned him toward Landberg, Tukhachevsky would have conquered Poland and ended up at Germany, where the Communists were in the process of fomenting revolution everywhere.

Europe might have been swallowed in those few months. After that escapade sensible Europeans ought to have realized that they were actually at the mercy of a raid by the Soviets.

Weygand had been rushed to Warsaw. De Gaulle as well. They had been sent from Paris in reckless haste to save the Poles. They came back to France convinced that their mere presence and their wise strategic counsels had put the Soviets to flight. But Tukhachevsky's retreat had been due only to a tactical difficulty. With better coordination, the Russians might have been back in Berlin a few weeks later. Whether conceited or blind, the Europeans preferred to believe that they had slammed the door in the face of the Soviet Union forever.

After Germany's defeat in World War I, Tukhachevsky had returned clandestinely to Germany five times.

As the secret military envoy in Berlin of the Soviet regime he was charged on the one hand – as was later known – with taking over the leadership of a *coup d'état* by the German Communists, should they rise. Victor Alexandrov and the Soviet Ambassador Raskolnikov in particular have revealed: „In 1923 he was one of a 'special' group of six members led by Piatakov, who, in the event that the revolution triumphed in Germany, was to take command of the German 'Red Guard.' this group was lodged at No. 7 Unter den Linden, in the embassy building of the USSR.”

Tukhachevsky had later gone back to Germany in the most natural way in the world, as an official guest of the Reichswehr, for various periods between 1926 and 1932.

The Reichswehr during this time was flirting with the USSR, which provided it with secret exercise grounds in their distant provinces. Tukhachevsky had impressed his German hosts not only by his talent but also by his inborn courtesy and his almost Parisian culture – one of his grandmothers was French. He was the son of nobles, and one of his ancestors had been assistant governor of Berlin in the 18th century.

Other Germans had found him too proud, too sure of himself. The principal officer with whom he had dealt was Gen. Guderian, who even at that time was convinced of the decisive effectiveness of armored forces formed into large units

such as would later be constituted by Hitler.

Tukhachevsky had retained that instruction and turned it against the Reich, anticipating by several years its utilization by the Führer, who at that time was still just electioneering for the party.

In 1935 Tukhachevsky had at his disposal a well-ordered strike force of tanks, having increased it tenfold in three years: the first 20 battalions had become 200 battalions, grouped in brigades that would soon become divisions and then armored corps.

The air force had maintained the same pace. As early as 1934 the USSR could count on three airborne divisions.

In 1936 this military manpower, which Tukhachevsky had firmly in hand, would reach 2 million available men.

Stalin began to get uneasy about having one man manipulating such a force in the USSR, and Hitler just as much felt the danger to Germany represented by this young military commander. As master not only of the Soviet army but – perhaps one day, who knows – of the Soviet state, Tukhachevsky would be able in a matter of just a few months to unleash a cataclysm at the gates of Berlin, all the more so since he was openly in favor of a war against the new Reich.

Hitler, knowing his talents and his intentions, had no desire to see him make the first move.

The expression „having recourse to a preventative war“ is one that appears constantly in Tukhachevsky’s pronouncements prior to 1937.

„The situation is plainly favorable for us,“ he had explained to Marshal Yegorov, his colleague on the general staff, in 1936. „Let us examine the facts. At the end of this year the Third Reich will have available no more than three armored divisions, and even these will be equipped almost exclusively with just light and medium tanks. At the time of the last German military review, foreign observers for the first time were able to see an entire armored division pass by. It bore the number 3. Well, everything leads us to believe that if Hitler had four or five divisions, he would have paraded one by bearing the number 4 or 5....“

„I will pass over the figures of our production in silence. Let me continue: in 1937 the number of German army corps will barely reach fourteen. France and Czechoslovakia together will have thirty-five. And once again I am leaving our army out of my demonstration. But then we can ask ourselves: what are we waiting for?“

Do we hope that with time the ratio of forces will be more and more favorable to us?"

Marshal Yegorov had summarized the position: „The manner in which comrade Tukhachevsky poses the question implies that he would not be resolutely hostile to a preventative war.“

Tukhachevsky had replied without hesitation: „Sooner or later we shall be obliged to fight each other. Then why not do it while we are the ones best prepared?"

He had been sent as a representative of the USSR to the funeral of the king of England by Stalin, who, lacking anything specific to charge him with, preferred to flatter the man who was later to be shot, rather than to worry him.

In London, Tukhachevsky had acted imprudently. He had held secret meetings with the British chiefs of staff and revealed to them how far the USSR had come in developing the production of artillery, planes and tanks, hoping thereby to push the British to that preventive war that he had made his bible and his koran. He even submitted to the British his plan of Russian military support by means of an air bridge to Czechoslovakia in case the British and French and their Central European allies should attack Hitler's Germany.

The British shrugged their shoulders. Like the Soviets, they didn't relish firing the first shot. Moreover, they did not believe the strength of the Red Army – very real though it was – to be as Tukhachevsky had described it to them.

The ambassador of Great Britain in Moscow, Lord Chilton, had written at the time: „The Red Army is incapable of supporting a war in enemy territory.“ „Penetrating the Russian army would be like going into butter," explained Lord Lochan, one of the most important politicians in the United Kingdom.

Quite a bit later Secretary Chamberlain would declare: „I don't in the least believe in the capability of the Russians to sustain a real offensive, even if they wanted to.“

Tukhachevsky had thus failed to convince the British. They had all remained as unmoved as the Tower of London.

At Paris, Tukhachevsky had again compromised himself even more but with no more success. He had hunted up Gen. Gamelin. Gamelin, as blind as a rampart of Vauban, didn't trust anything but the concrete of his Maginot Line.

„A preventive war," he solemnly replied to the Russian, „would be

disapproved of by the majority of public opinion.”

The army, for him, was the electorate.

The Czechs alone had been encouraging.

„The USSR,” Tukhachevsky had said in Prague, as he had said in London, „will completely fulfill the obligations imposed on her by her treaty with Czechoslovakia should the latter enter into conflict with the Reich, this regardless of the origin of the conflict and even if Czechoslovakia decided to ward off an eventual German aggression by a preventative war.”

Always the preventative war. That came at the head of all Tukhachevsky’s strategic plans. Benes, moreover, was completely brought around to this point of view. He had joined in with Tukhachevsky’s plan to the point that he had formally declared to Gen. Semenov, the Soviet military attaché: „As soon as you are in a state of armed conflict with Germany, Czechoslovakian forces will penetrate the territory of the Third Reich and march simultaneously on Munich and Berlin.”

These initiatives of Tukhachevsky’s, which were immediately squealed to the Soviet police, had irritated Stalin, who did not wish to get involved prematurely in any way in a preventive war, nor even a semi-preventive one. He meant to conduct the reverse of that operation: to make use of other countries to pave the way for him, to turn Germany against the West and the West against Germany, and then to utilize one or both as an „icebreaker to shatter the capitalist world.”

„The liberties taken by Tukhachevsky overstep [his] bounds,” writes Benoist-Méchin, analyzing Stalin’s state of mind. „Not content with meeting in secret conferences with Soviet military attaches abroad and divulging military secrets of the greatest importance to the British and the French, now he takes it upon himself openly to state views that are in conflict with those of the government. Is he the one directing the policies of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics? Does he already dunk himself master of the Kremlin?”

Crouching in his thicket of suspicions, by nature suspicious of everything, and having already put to death many competitors who worried him, from then on Stalin had Tukhachevsky’s name inscribed on the very first page of his red notebook of suspects.

Analyzing the secret intelligence, he received from Paris, Prague and London, Hitler, like a silent fox, had followed Stalin’s psychic development with watchful eyes.

If he succeeded in aggravating Stalin's suspicions, in reinforcing them by means of evident proofs, perhaps he could manage to have Stalin himself dispose of Tukhachevsky, the one true war leader the Soviets possessed and the one he most feared, before the Wehrmacht was ready.

Hitler began to prepare the investment of Josef Stalin's brain with discreet, progressive, almost imperceptible touches, advancing toward his goal not by the highway but through the roadside thickets.

Benes, everyone knew, was the confidant most trusted by the master of Moscow. Stalin had Czechoslovakia at his disposal. Czech airfields were dotted with Soviet planes manned by Soviet pilots. If Hitler succeeded in circumventing Benes, indirectly he would be circumventing Stalin.

Hitler advanced like an invisible mole burrowing his underground passage with little strokes of muzzle and paw.

The first man Hitler used against the Czechs was a double agent of the Soviets named Nicolas Skobline, who was officially the president of the *Organisation Mondiale des Militaires Russes en Émigration* [World Organization of Russian Servicemen Emigres].

Skobline had a great need of money. He had married a prima ballerina of remarkable beauty, hence of costly upkeep, who was the former mistress of an agent of the GPU; and she had delivered her often moneyless new lover into the toils of her old USSR employers.

Skobline, with ever increasing financial needs, had also become an agent of Reinhard Heydrich, the most formidable man of the German security services.

In using this Russian, Heydrich was playing a dangerous game. He knew the man's duplicity. His colleagues warned him of the danger, but Heydrich was audacious and of very superior intelligence, and he accepted the risk.

On his instructions, an ex-officer of the Russian navy who was in his service, Nicolas Alexeiev, deliberately let himself be arrested by the French espionage service. Duly grilled by a Paris military examining magistrate and playing the classic spy who wants to regain his freedom, he went on to „confessions“ that were bound to make an extraordinary impression: „Marshal Tukhachevsky“, he revealed, „is in the process of fomenting a plot against Stalin in league with high-ranking German military officers. At the time of his recent visit to France,“ he added, „he had the Soviet military attaches at Prague and Warsaw come secretly to Paris in order to win them over to his plan.“

The physical fact of this meeting was true. So any manner of suppositions could be embroidered onto it.

The secret report of the French examining magistrate implicating Tukhachevsky had been sent in great secrecy to the military attaché of the French embassy at Prague so that he could transmit it to Benes. Upon reading it, the Czech president had been impressed without being entirely convinced.

He nevertheless remembered some strange confidences made to his chief of the general staff by the general and future Soviet marshal, Chapochnikov, who, like Tukhachevsky, had belonged to the czarist army; so that both, as deserters to the enemy, were capable of turning their coats a second time.

„During the civil war,” Chapochnikov had said in a subdued voice, „I might very well have become one of the leaders of Denikin’s White Army if, instead of finding myself in Moscow in 1918, I had been in Rostov-on-Don, where the White Army was born. I believe that for all of us officers of the general staff, being won over to White or Red simply depended upon our geographical circumstances.”

A second „arrest“ a few days later, just as spontaneous as the one at Paris, was going to reinforce the disquieting revelation communicated to Benes by the French government.

An informant of Skobline’s named Grylevitch, in Switzerland this time, worked for him as an agent within Trotskyite circles in Geneva, while having it believed by the latter that he was politically of their persuasion. Like many of his colleagues, he was subsidized by another espionage service, that of the Czechs. Skobline was going to do a replay in Switzerland of the Paris coup.

A few days later, Grylevitch is arrested. As Skobline had predicted, he ‘confesses’ everything, and more besides. To take his word for it, Tukhachevsky was preparing a violent coup in Moscow with the Trotskyites and certain members of the German general staff. An initial police report taking note of these statements is sent to Benes. Upon looking through it, the president of the Czechoslovakian republic thinks the sky has fallen in.

Benoist-Méchin adds:

The thing seems inconceivable to him. However, the poison is starting to work without his knowing it. As he is about to throw the report in the wastebasket, he thinks better of it and tucks it away – to whom it may concern – in his personal file.

The two confessions confirm each other. It would require only a few last licks to give them a quite worrisome aspect.

Heydrich himself came all the way from Berlin to set up in person the third operation of „psychological disinformation,” as it would be called today.

The Czechs at the time were negotiating a commercial agreement with the Reich. An expert from the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Herr Trautmannsdorf, was given the commission of casually introducing into the conversation with the Czech negotiator, Mr. Mastny, Benes’s ambassador in Berlin, just as if nothing were the matter, a few words that would raise the beginnings of suspicion. Trautmannsdorf was to give the diplomat to understand that it would perhaps be useful if their negotiations not last too long because there was something fishy going on.

„I know,” he said almost confidentially in the Czech’s ear, „that you’re afraid you’ll antagonize the Russians by signing this agreement, but the Russian military people have contacted our people to put an end to the tension between our two countries. The policy of the USSR could very well undergo a change of direction, and then it would be too late....”.

The Czech diplomat swallowed the bait. That very day he dispatched a report to Benes containing that astonishing conversation.

After the revelations of the examining judge at Paris and the complementary „confessions” of the agent Grylevitch in Switzerland, this intelligence from his own ambassador in Berlin finally convinced Benes.

Posthaste he summoned the minister of the USSR in Prague, Mr. Alexandrovsky, to the government palace. He communicated the report of his diplomat in Berlin and the earlier „confessions” from France and Switzerland.

Having no further suspicions, he had just fallen into Heydrich’s trap. Three years after the war he would still harbor an ironclad belief in those documents uncovering the plot that had been furnished him, beyond any question of doubt, by Hitler’s espionage service. In his *Memoires de ma vie* that he published in the *Gazette de Lausanne* of March 2, 1948, he would still write ingenuously: „In January 1937 an unofficial communication from Berlin apprised me that the negotiations there were considered to have failed. A strictly confidential note added that Hitler was for the time being pursuing other secret talks, which, in case they were successful, would also have repercussions on our policy. A word let slip by Trautmannsdorff made it clear to us that it concerned negotiations with certain Soviet circles, notably Tukhachevsky, Rykov and others. Hitler was so convinced of the success of these

negotiations that he didn't insist on concluding an agreement with us, so persuaded was he of success with Moscow. To be sure, if he had succeeded in his purpose and had been able to alter the course of Soviet policy, the face of Europe would have been changed; but Stalin intervened in good time. I immediately informed Mr. Alexandrovsky, the minister of the USSR at Prague, of the news we had received from Berlin, supplemented by the Mastny-Trautmannsdorf conversation."

Churchill himself had swallowed the bait set by the Gestapo to trap Benes, and he swallowed it whole. In his memoirs he recalls „the service that Benes rendered Stalin."

„The military conspiracy and the plot of the Communist Old Guard aimed at overthrowing Stalin and giving Russia a new regime whose policy would have been pro-German. Without wasting a moment, President Benes let Stalin know all the information he had been able to collect. Shortly afterward a ruthless purge was carried out in Soviet Russia." Benes hastened to inform not only Stalin of this „plot," but also his dear French colleague of the Front Populaire, M. Léon Blum.

Blum stated on June 18, 1945: „At the end of 1936, I received privately and in strict confidence from my friend, M. Edouard Benes, a warning transmitted by my son, who was passing through Prague, urgently advising me to observe the greatest precaution in our relations with the Soviet general staff. According to his own intelligence service – and the Czech intelligence service enjoyed a well-deserved reputation in Europe – the leaders of the Soviet high command general staff were having questionable dealings with Germany. A few months later the trial known as the Tukhachevsky Trial burst on the scene."

Hitler, through Heydrich, was nearing his goal. In a short while he would reach it. Upon receiving Benes's news, Stalin had roared as if someone had torn off his nose and his ears.

However, Benes had sent him only confessions and third-hand information. It was proof, direct and definitive proof, that he needed. He immediately summoned Iegov, his new chief of the NKVD, and thrust the file of papers from Prague under his nose.

„I'm sick of all these conspiracies." he shouted. „I want to get to the bottom of it, and the only way you'll earn my confidence is not to come and tell me there is no plot, but to bring me the proof."

Hitler was going to furnish him the proof at a huge price. And the cost to Hitler would be no more than a strong dose of imagination and guile.

The Russians were going to come and beg for the proof themselves and pay for it to the last cent Soviet police had been dispatched to look for the proof in Germany.

The embassy of the USSR in Berlin was on edge. A member of the staff was maintaining momentary contacts with a man in Hitler's entourage. This man, after a great deal of urging, intimated to his questioner that in fact to his knowledge certain proofs did exist, but that it would certainly be very difficult to obtain them.

Having come on this first scent, the functionary of the Soviet embassy boarded an airplane leaving for Moscow. He brought back a special emissary of the GPU named Jeschov, who carried official accreditation. Stalin had personally ordered him to get the mentioned proof at any price.

Hitler's intermediary, playing his role to perfection, demurred. He would not be easy to corrupt.

Heydrich needed time. The proofs so ardently coveted by Moscow, the proofs that would absolutely establish Tukhachevsky's guilt – he still had to get possession of them, that is to say, to manufacture them.

Handwritten letters sent by Tukhachevsky to high-ranking German officers did exist, it was true, letter's dating from the years of regular technical collaboration. But they were in the quadruple-locked strong boxes of the general staff of the Wehrmacht. To ask the Wehrmacht for them, or to request them from the head of Army Intelligence, Admiral Canaris, a sly enemy of the regime, was to run the risk of having Canaris inform Tukhachevsky himself of the maneuver and upset the whole operation.

Heydrich preferred to procure them directly.

The head of Nazi counterespionage, SS Gen. Walter Schellenberg, related after the war.

Hitler issued an explicit order to leave the staff of the German army in absolute ignorance of what was brewing against Tukhachevsky lest German officers should alert the Soviet marshal.

Heydrich consequently one night sent two police brigades to break open the secret archives of the general staff of the *Abwehr* (Army Intelligence Service, directed by Admiral Canaris).

Break-in experts from the Criminal Division of the Police Administration accompanied the brigades. In three places they found and seized files

concerning the collaboration of the German General Headquarters and the Red Army. Important information was also found in Admiral Canaris's file cards. To cover up the break-in, a fire was started which eliminated all traces of it. In the resulting confusion, the special brigades were able to sneak away without being noticed.

Walter Hagen, a high official of the Gestapo, in his book the *Geheime Front*, has recounted the sequel to that operation of state burglary: „In that way the necessary models were obtained for the intended forgeries. The work of falsification began in April of 1937 in the vaults beneath the Gestapo building, on Prinz Albrecht Street in Berlin. [SS Gen. Herman] Behrens had a laboratory equipped with all the most advanced technical inventions. He himself kept watch, and the workrooms were completely isolated. Only those persons strictly indispensable had access to them.”

What was this „dossier” going to contain? „It is certain,” Walter Hagen adds, „that in the vaults of Albrecht Street, forgeries were made of a correspondence several years old between Tukhachevsky and his collaborators and various important German generals. It was clearly deduced from this correspondence that the ‘Red Napoleon’ had won over the Wehrmacht to his conspiracy plans against Stalin.”

„At the end of a few days” (four days), Gen. Walter Schellenberg writes, „all the material was ready.”

„As early as the first days of May,” Walter Hagen states, „Himmler was able to present Hitler with a red rug containing a fairly large packet of documents. Besides the letters, the file contained documents of all sorts, including receipts signed by Soviet generals acknowledging the payment of large sums by German counterespionage in exchange for information they had furnished. All these forged letters of Tukhachevsky and other Soviet generals bore the necessary stamps and seals. The signatures of von Seeckt, Hammeistein, Canaris and other generals establishing that they had seen the letters were magnificently forged. The letters of important Germans addressed to the Russian conspirators were there in the form of carbon copies.” Also in the rug were carbon copies of forged letters in which the head of German counterespionage thanked Tukhachevsky and other Soviet generals for the information they had furnished about the Red Army.

Very particular care had been taken with the preparation of forged receipts. Some of them endorsed by Tukhachevsky himself had been forged from true bills for expenses signed by the Soviet marshal when he had been in Germany as an official guest of the Reichswehr. The scale of remuneration that Tukhachevsky was supposed to have received for his espionage services has been revealed by Alexandrov, the Russian author, and by Raskolnikov, the Soviet diplomat,

ambassador of the USSR at Sofia at the time this drama took place:

- 5,000 RM for information of secondary importance;
- 10,000 RM for „regular“ reports;
- 30,000 RM for important reports;
- 250,000 RM for the „general plan of mobilization and regional disposition“ of the USSR.

On this basis, Tukhachevsky presumably received 1,000,000 Reichsmarks in total.

It was still necessary that the emissary of the GPU take this accusatory forged dossier seriously.

„If you turn it over to them for nothing,“ Hitler pointed out to Heydrich, „they will have doubts about it. We must on the contrary demand an enormous sum of money from them so that they will be convinced that their ‘German accomplice’ is letting them have a dossier worth its weight in gold.“

Heydrich: „How much should we ask?“

Hitler: „Three million rubles“. In those days that was a fantastic sum, an amount never paid for an espionage dossier. Stalin’s emissary ran through the documents. He opened his attaché case and released the three million in packets. Tukhachevsky’s fate was sealed.

Hitler felt not the slightest personal dislike for Tukhachevsky. In truth, he admired him. He would have been very willing to name him commander-in-chief of the Wehrmacht.

Unfortunately, Tukhachevsky commanded – and very well – the army of the other side, an army that could crush Germany if Hitler, at least for a time, could not neutralize its impact. War is war. Tukhachevsky was determined to unleash a preventative war against Germany, hence he was public enemy No. 1. If Hitler wished to stop the enormous and more and more dangerous development of the Red Army and its drive against his country, it was absolutely imperative that Tukhachevsky, a determined partisan of a military intervention in Germany, be put out of the running before he took action.

The founder of the Red Army, the Jewish Bronstein, known under the name of Trotsky, had been struck down before him. He had been cashiered by Stalin in 1924. But he had saved his skin intact and had been able to find exile in Turkey, in France, in Norway and in America. Stalin had regretted what he called his *mansuetude*, but it

was not until 16 years later, on Aug. 20, 1940, that he succeeded in having someone bash in Trotsky's skull in Mexico with a mountain climber's ice axe. Upon receipt of the dossier from Berlin, Tukhachevsky was clearly going to be arrested and court-martialed.

Stalin's rage this time would be exercised more swiftly than with Trotsky. It would be the fury of a savage. On June 11, 1937, an official communique of two short pages announced straightaway that Tukhachevsky and a number of „accomplices“ were remanded before a military tribunal under an indictment of having taken part „in an undertaking against the state in liaison with leading military circles of a foreign power then following an unfriendly policy toward the USSR.“

Incredibly, after interrogations of which we know nothing at all, Tukhachevsky and all of his codefendants formally acknowledged the authenticity of the forged documents and the forged receipts that the tribunal brandished before them. It was scarcely to be believed. In an open hearing, the victims of the forgeries stated that the forgeries were true documents.

In reality, this was not at all exceptional. Invariably in the USSR, the accused have acknowledged themselves guilty of the worst monstrosities of which they have been falsely accused. Koestler has explained it strikingly in his *Le Zero el l'Infini* [a French version of *Darkness at Noon*].

Obviously no graphological examination of any kind was made. There was no preliminary examination. No public trial either. Nor any defense. Tukhachevsky and the other accused had admitted that the forged Berlin documents were really their own. That was sufficient. Capital punishment. The following day a bulletin of a dozen lines on the very last page of the newspapers announced that the Tukhachevsky group had one and all been executed that same night.

„All the accused have acknowledged themselves to be entirely guilty of the accusations brought against them.“ So read the judgment handed down on June 11, 1937. Stalin's fury extended to Tukhachevsky's entire family. They were all killed: his wife, his daughter, his brother, his four sisters.

Shortly afterward it would even come to this, that seven out of nine of Tukhachevsky's judges would be shot the same year, just to make sure that they would keep the professional secret. [Note about foregoing sentence: in the French text, p. 354, first line on the page, the word seven is crossed out and has a couple of question marks above it. Whether Degrelle forgot to make a change or correction he contemplated or decided not to make a change after all, the translator can't tell. But that's the way he left it – Ed.] Stalin would not stop there.

Thirty-two thousand or 35,000 – no one knows exactly – of the 60,000 officers of the Soviet army would be killed.

It was no longer a purge; it was a massacre. Tens of thousands of officers were deemed to have been confederates of Tukhachevsky. Three out of five marshals would be killed. Two hundred and twenty brigade commanders out of 406. One hundred and ten division commanders out of 195. Fifty-seven army corps commanders out of 85. Thirteen army commanders out of 15. Below them: 90 percent of the generals and 80 percent of the colonels would be killed, in a few months the immense army of the Soviets was without commanders and in outright anarchy. More than half of the corps of officers had been assassinated.

Hitler could never have dreamed of such an annihilation of the army that so short a time ago had been an imminent threat. An annihilation carried out by Stalin himself, that was the beauty of it. Thanks to that extraordinary collaboration, four years would be won by Hitler before the massive Soviet military forces had an adequate command structure again. They would come close to being totally annihilated in the summer and fall of 1941 because of that incredible decapitation which had left the bleeding cadres virtually devoid of all but the most spineless officers, who trembled when the tyrant so much as frowned. Who in the USSR would still be overzealous?

„Zeal is useful only in catching fleas,” said Marshal Semyon Budenny, one of the two surviving marshals. The other surviving marshal, Chapochnikov, who could just as easily as any of the others have been stood up against the wall, had heaved an enormous sigh of relief to be named „director of the chess club.”

In his „Secret Report,” Khrushchev himself would admit that „the massive elimination of military leaders carried out by Stalin had disastrous effects on the Red Army, to which may be ascribed the latter’s defeats during the first phase of World War II.” But Khrushchev would not say it until after Stalin’s death, in those terrible days of June 1937, when Stalin, the great carnivore, was sounding his death howl in the steppe, Khrushchev was howling even louder with the pack. In the very month Tukhachevsky was assassinated, Khrushchev exclaimed: „Stalin is the greatest genius, the master and leader of humanity.” He called for still more slaughter: „We shall annihilate our enemies to the last man and fling their ashes to the winds.”

Two days later, before the Communists of Kiev, his political bailiwick, Khrushchev again emphasized: „We have already annihilated a considerable number of our enemies but not all.” That was denouncing the thousands of future victims: 1,108 members of the congress out of 1,966, in other words more than half, were massacred. And 98 members of the 138 directors of the Soviet Central Committee.

It was a matter of who would offer the most pledges of servility to save his own skin. Everyone had become a suspect, that is to say automatically guilty. The whole party, just like the army, was torn to pieces. The Soviet archives remain silent about all these crimes, silent as the grave. Assuming there were graves. How many didn't just have „their ashes flung to the winds,” as the valiant Khrushchev put it? Stalin had carried irony to the point of seeing that he got Tukhachevsky's execution free of charge. He had noted down the numbers of the 3 million rubles sent to Berlin in payment of the prefabricated dossier. The first Germans who used the bills in Russia were immediately arrested.

Both of the players had swindled the other. But Hitler was the real winner. The 3 million rubles did not interest him; they had been no more than part of the bluff. What counted for him was the decapitation of the Soviet military, which would now be without offensive power for a long time. The „preventative war” had been defeated before it even got started.

Stalin had performed titanic labors prior to 1936 in order to industrialize his country and give it the largest army in the world, with 10 times as many armored vehicles as Hitler. He could have used it then and there to sweep away every obstacle in the world. And now, manipulated by his own enemy, he had just gutted it frightfully, delaying any chance of a worldwide expansion of Communism for some years to come.

For Hitler, it had been absolutely imperative at the time to make Stalin lose those years if, facing the immediate threat of a Tukhachevsky, he intended to make up the lag not only of his own country but of Europe as a whole. He had attained his goal by getting Stalin himself to eliminate the man upon whom primarily rested the shock force of his army.

Following Tukhachevsky's execution and the „purge,” the massacre of tens of thousands of officers paralyzed for some time the military power of the Soviets. Hitler was not blind. The Soviet danger would reappear. But Germany had won her respite. Hitler could now spur on his quite young army barely emerged from nothing.

He had created a revolutionary doctrine of warfare from the ground up. Night and day he was going to hammer out on the anvil of the New Reich the red-hot iron of his elite Wehrmacht, the Wehrmacht of modern arms, the Wehrmacht of youth, the Wehrmacht of the people.

CHAPTER 50

REVOLUTIONIZING WARFARE

Compulsory military service had not been reestablished in the Reich until March 16, 1935, after France had inaugurated her own two-year enlistment. The decision to create 12 army corps in Germany comprising 36 divisions had only been taken on that same day. Equipment was practically nonexistent.

„It is certain,” wrote Gen. Gamelin, head of the French army, „that at that time we were clearly ahead of all the other armies insofar as the quality of the prototypes we had adopted was concerned.“

When, a year later, on March 7, 1936, Adolf Hitler decided to reoccupy militarily the German left bank of the Rhine, he still only had available, as we know today, a hybrid force that a swift French attack would have sent right back to the other side of the bridges of Koblenz and Cologne.

In 1936, Hitler could at best have mustered only a fourth as many soldiers as the Russians had and a tenth as many tanks. In terms of quantity, Hitler was thus the loser. He could make up for it and reestablish a degree of balance only by means of quality: quality of strategy, quality of equipment and quality of the human beings involved.

The art of warfare as it had been practiced during World War I no longer had validity for Hitler. Any way he looked at it, confronting the enemy numerically, forces against forces, he would be beaten. If he had to go up against France, France and her British, Polish and Czech allies would come to the meeting with forces several times more numerous than his own. If the encounter were to come with the USSR, he would have to fight one against four. It was finis absolutely imperative that he devise a new strategy based on unexpected breakthrough forces, on quality and on speed.

That would be the blitzkrieg, the lightning war: it was going to make it possible to rush at an enemy and defeat him in a flash and be able immediately to make a second attack on a second adversary. It would also mean the coordinated use of massive armored forces combined with air forces slashing to pieces any obstacle in front of the tank divisions, piercing and dispersing it like divisions of cavalry in bygone times.

At the end of World War I, the use of tanks grouped in large units had been inaugurated by the British. The defeat of Germany was due in good part to the skepticism of the German command, its unwillingness to make massive use of this new tactic, which, though making its first appearance, was strikingly effective.

The old Allied military staffs had quickly gone back to the old notions of the superiority of the infantry. However, several foreign strategists had continued after 1918 to advocate the use of this innovation on a large scale. On the Soviet side, Marshal Tukhachevsky had been eager to make it the basis of the reconstruction of the Red Army.

In France, de Gaulle, then a colonel, haughty and scornful but discerning, had tried to shake the old military staffs – once more dozing in the quagmire of conformity – out of their torpor by demanding, vainly, the formation of large armored units.

Before 1939, tanks were generally spread around at the rate of four per infantry battalion. They were just mechanized, armored artillery that could be moved at a bit faster pace on favorable terrain. But dispersed, their breakthrough force was nil. Tanks were worthwhile only when they were brought together in a main striking force, driving forward as a whole to open a great breach through which the infantry – also mechanized – would then hurl themselves in attack.

The Allied staff officers in 1935 still persisted in increasing the number of cavalry divisions – i.e., mounted horse soldiers – which 50 machine guns could mow down. It was the high-speed motor, the armored weapon, then invulnerable, that was to replace the horse that went down at the first burst of gunfire.

De Gaulle talked himself blue in vain. He did not wake up any of the aged brass hats. He simply gained their dislike. The plans he presented to the parliament were rejected. He would have no following, or at most only a very small one, until it was too late: the one and only French armored division, poorly equipped and scarcely broken in, that would see action in May 1940 at the last minute, after the disaster of Sedan, would be scattered like a box of matches on that same day.

In Germany the traditional generals had been no more clear-sighted than their French colleagues caught up in the ways of the past. Having been half a century in the military profession, they thought themselves forever possessed of the absolute in military science. They considered every proposed innovation an insult to their intelligence equivalent to the crime of *lese-majeste*, above all when, as in Germany, it was a former corporal who had the presumption to wish to give lessons to the high command.



The Blitzkrieg: Germany occupied Luxembourg on May 10, 1940, with little resistance- six Luxembourgian policemen and soldiers were injured. The German campaign against Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg was motivated by British and French efforts to use the Low Countries as bases of operation against the German Reich.

Hitler had in fact tried to convert these old army officers to his revolutionary ideas of strategy. For a long period he would experience almost scornful opposition from members of the high command general staff who were as inflexible as their former pointed helmets of 1914. He would often be sabotaged by them and was even the target of several plots, including attempts at his assassination.

He would be extremely patient, for however hidebound they might be in their prejudices, these army conservatives in the beginning at least were indispensable to him if he wished to assemble the physical framework of his Wehrmacht. They were professionals. Without their often fussy methods, without their training, without their rigorous adherence to regulations, the job of creating this enormous military machine would come to nothing at the very outset, at the mere barracks stage.

Some of these old military fossils living in the past never did learn at all. Others adapted. Some of them, like Guderian and Rommel, understood Hitler perfectly. They fell in step with him quickly and enthusiastically. But whether grumbling or understanding, all staff officers did continue to comply with orders. With Hitler, it would have been difficult to do otherwise: the monocles of the reactionaries would have gone flying into the air like wood chips. When Hitler gave a command, you obeyed or else. The Führer's most immediate task then was to get stalled on the creation of the large units of which he dreamed.

The summer of 1936 had no sooner come – after a year of work – than three panzer divisions had come into being. One at Weimar. The second at Berlin. The third at Wuerzburg, commanded by the officer who had been first to understand Hitler's idea, Gen. Guderian, the future spearhead of the Reich's armored forces. A fourth armored division was already being readied in Westphalia. Each of these divisions would be composed of 300 tanks, in terms of equipment they would be provided with all the most effective means required to engage in combat in complete autonomy.

In May of 1940 it would no longer be four panzer divisions that Hitler could hurl before him like enormous packs of wolves across France, but 10 armored divisions riding on more than 3,000 tanks, steel battering rams with 3,000 irresistible heads. Irresistible because Hitler had seen farther, or to be precise, higher than tank divisions. It was he who invented the strategy of pairing planes with tanks. In that connection, whatever tales may have been told about it since, he was the only one before 1940 to think of it.

De Gaulle did not even have any idea of it. In later editions of his books after 1945, the impression is given that he had been the inventor, or one of the inventors, of this revolutionary method of warfare. But the passages that imply that he thought up the strategy are brazen additions. In the editions of that time, de Gaulle never speaks of anything but tanks alone, not having discerned that making a slashing attack on the terrain in front of the tanks with diving planes would facilitate their advance. That would be the role of the Stukas plunging down from the sky at a terrifying speed with a great howling of engines, pinning down the soldiers or putting them to flight, devastating all the defense works, and opening gaping holes for the passage of the hundreds of tanks that have nothing more to do but to rush *en masse* through the gaps. That combination – that team assault – would be the greatest of military discoveries, a discovery of genius by Hitler.

Tukhachevsky had thought of a similar innovation when he created divisions of parachutists who would fall upon the target just as the tanks were beginning their onslaught. Such a descent, however, was slow and fraught with risk. On the ground, fallen where the wind has brought him, entangled in his harness, a man is inevitably less effective than a screaming aerial torpedo fragmenting, pulverizing every bit of trench, every machine-gun nest, every cannon.

Hitler's solution was the good one. A simple solution, as all his solutions were simple. They were the essential basis of the strategic and tactical revolution of World War II. It was thanks to that solution that Hitler would annihilate the French army in three days in 1940. And that he reached Smolensk in three weeks in 1941.

He would not be effectively opposed until the Americans and their Russian

protégés turned the invention against him a few years later and with the aid of much greater means, with 50,000 tanks instead of the 3,000 of 1940 and 100,000 planes instead of Hitler's 4,000-5,000. But he was the inventor of the new strategy – even if this invention, which gave him **his** triumphs from 1939 to 1942, finally brought about his ruin.

While France from 1926 on was putting untold billions into the belly of the gigantic concrete crocodile called the Maginot Line – a futile monument to laziness – Hitler, at infinitely less expense but with the decision-making power of the true leader and an imagination that bent reality to his will, gave a revolutionary structure to a Wehrmacht just emerging from the ooze, like man on the sixth day of terrestrial creation.

In his new army Hitler would of course be the sole master.

He was no Wilhelm n, a mere ornamental leader exercising just the facade of power in time of war. With Hitler, fictitious authority was a thing of the past the supreme command vested in the head of state would become more than a simple peacetime ornament Hitler would exercise it in time of war personally and totally.

By virtue of the law he had promulgated on Aug. 1, 1934, the six principal rights reserved to the military command were his exclusive responsibility: the right of organization (he could create or dissolve the military as he pleased); the right of promotion and appointment; the right of inspection (nothing would escape his discerning eye); the right of distribution (the various military units would be distributed, stationed, altered according to his orders only); the right of mobilization; and, finally, the right of grace.

The minister of war would thenceforth serve as his immediate instrument for carrying out his orders. Under him, the military forces would be separated into three great divisions: the ground forces (Gen. von Fritsch); the air forces (Marshal Goering); and the navy (Adm. Raeder). The ground forces were temporarily composed – pending improvement – of 10 army corps, each three divisions in strength.

As for the air force – six *Luftkreise* – it had a strength on April 1, 1936, of 18 wings of 81 planes each. The same year two additional *Luftkreise* would add six more wings of 81 planes. Total: 1,944 aircraft. That was not yet the Himalayas. But those 1,944 planes represented equipment of the very highest quality, superlatively manned by physically and morally elite aircrews working with exemplary discipline in exact accord with the new strategy ordered by Hitler.

The coordination of the air wings, the panzer divisions and the mobile infantry

had even then been very precisely determined: 1) The panzer divisions must have regular divisions following in their tracks. 2) The pace of the latter must therefore be accelerated. This acceleration can be obtained only by the motorization, if not of all their units, of at least a sufficient number of them to enable them to rush into the breach opened by the tanks. 3) The penetrating force of the panzer divisions must be increased by having them preceded by waves of bomber planes.

In one year 650,000 young Germans were thus given training in accordance with an absolutely new strategy that no adversary had foreseen.

Only Hitler's energy of steel had made this vigorous start possible in so short a lapse of time. The difficulties had been without number. The commanders of large units, faced with the affluence of these 650,000 or so recruits, no longer knew which way to turn. They were suffering from an enormous shortage of cadres. But Hitler gave the order: there was no dragging their feet. „I give you back an army,“ he told the generals, who were dead tired and at times overtaxed, „and you dare to complain about it.“

He knew perfectly well that he was going through a very dangerous period. It would be at least another year or two before his 36 divisions would be usable. In the East as in the West the net had been cast in which they meant to catch him and strangle him. He had to act fast His orders were harsh. Everyone had to obey whether he liked it or not, and to work until he dropped.

„The German nation,“ Hitler repeated, „has withstood the great migrations, the Roman wars, the invasion of the Huns, the Tartars and the Mongols. It has withstood the Thirty Years War, the wars of the time of Frederick and the age of Napoleon, and it will endure me as well.“ Everyone did endure. Indeed they were all super zealous, for they knew that otherwise Hitler would come down hard on their lazy heads.

„It is really true,“ Benoist-Méchin writes, „that in the following months fantastic progress is made. Unceasingly new units are added to those already in existence. Rifles, machine guns, cannon, tanks come out of the factories at an accelerated pace. The number of *Wehrkreise* [corps areas] is increased from 10 to 12. The number of regular divisions goes from 36 to 50; of armored divisions, from three to six.“

But the thing that increased the most, even more than the number of divisions, was the tremendous morale of the young men of the new army, stronger than Guderian's tanks and all of Goering's Stukas.

Hitler did not carry away tens of millions of German voters without having perfected to the highest degree his tactics of psychological investment It was not

soldiers he was gathering together; they were ideological combatants. If a war broke out, it would not be just shells but ideas that would be fired off.

The new Germany of 1936 was vibrant with intense patriotism. For the Reich had given it direction again. It had ceased to be a conglomerate of classes poorly cemented together and had become a community in which everyone was a bit of life. It was a millennial heritage of grandeur, of culture, of spiritual radiance, of reverses, of afflictions, of victories. Everyone recognized anew every line of the face of his fatherland, felt the beat of its heart, the young people had forgotten the arbitrary lines of demarcation of the parties that formerly separated them. They now just fanned a whole of several millions of healthy young fellows and girls, beautiful and vigorous, trained in all the spoils, traveling about their country singing.

Established in especially splendid sites, regional schools and three national schools fanned a nursery of young leaders, both male and female. Every section of the Hitler Youth Movement (*Hitlerjugend*) down to the most remote village of any size had its life center, its field for sports, its ideological, cultural and professional meetings. In these centers as a whole, 2 million young workers pursued courses of a technical nature.

Every Wednesday evening at 8:15, they listened with comrades to a youth program – perhaps talks or songs or tourist information – broadcast by all the radio stations of the Reich. All of them, students on vacation as well as workers on holiday with pay, met as comrades, equal in everything, in the hundreds of campgrounds. There they engaged in all kind of sports, such as swimming and horseback riding, and the campfires in the evening were enlivened by group singing.

A network of 2,000 youth hostels provided with 25,000 beds gave lodging each year to hundreds of thousands of young excursionists. Many were installed in or beside historic old castles. The food was excellent and cost very little. The most stouthearted of the young people hiked in groups, with tent and cooking utensils on their backs, through the most beautiful regions of their country. Others – in 642 rural groups – went out helping the country people harvest the crops.

These young Germans, coming from all walks of life, were profoundly filled with the spirit of national community. But for all that they were not narrow nationalists. Their leaders taught them all a reasoned love for their own country but also opened their eyes to their higher fatherland: Europe. No other country did as much at the time to develop the European idea: in the course of only the single year of 1936, 224,000 young foreigners were received fraternally, as true comrades, in the camps and youth hostels of the Reich, or in the homes of young Germans. In living together, walking together, and engaging in all kinds of sports, they had acquired a physical vigor and a joy in living that was striking.

When receiving a Hitler Youth group at his chateau at Rambouillet, President Lebrun had said to them: „You are the happiest young people in the world.“ It was true. Prime Minister Chautemps, though openly anti-Nazi and a Freemason with apron, compass and square, had called them „the best representatives of their country.“ „The day will come when the German people will look on their young people with radiant joy and pride.“ So spoke Adolf Hitler.

Trained in that way patriotically, socially, and internationally, the hundreds of thousands of young Germans who left each year for the military camps did not go in poverty or idleness, as in so many countries where military service is drudgery. For them, it was an additional sharing in the solidarity of their nation. Physically, too, they were ready. Their instruction in sports, their hard and joyous training in fields and mountains had already halfway made soldiers of them.

A permanent liaison united their organizations to the Wehrmacht. The Wehrmacht assigned instructors to them. The most famous of them bore a name that would be known worldwide. He was a young colonel at that time. He wore round his neck the glorious insignia of the Order of Merit. His name was Erwin Rommel.

Another organization, fundamentally social, prepared young people for genuine nonmilitary service to the nation: that was the „Labor Front,“ whose essential goal was to send Germans of all classes through work training.

The law of June 26, 1935, establishing this *Arbeitsdienst*, stated: „All young Germans of both sexes must serve their people in the Labor Service. In conformity with the spirit of National Socialism, the Labor Service shall inculcate in German youth a sense of the national community and the new conception of work based on the respect due manual labor.“ The works the Labor Service had to carry out were strictly works of public utility.

It was only after having lived firsthand an integral social life, mingling constantly with workers and peasants, that a student was admitted to the university, an officeholder into an administrative job, or a recruit into the Wehrmacht. It was the socialization not of the machinery of the state but of men themselves in their flesh and their brains.

For six months, with all rigorously equal, they polished each other's characters. They lived in groups of seven in the camps or on construction sites, frugally and rationally equipped, and carried out community works of national interest Six hours of manual labor every day. Two hours of sport, political education and military preparation. Their „rifle“ was a spade. Their flag had a shovel on it You saw them passing along the highways, bare to the waist, bronzed by the sun.

„Tire young people brought together in the work camps,” the historian Mueller-Brandenburg wrote, „must live a common life there, bonded together by participation in mutual labors. The future officer, the future judge, the future employer live there side by side with the locksmith, the farm worker, the sailor, the manual laborer, the textile worker. They eat together, lodge together, and learn to know each other thoroughly in the work and by the work, and in the get-togethers they spend in the evenings with their leaders. The time then comes when these young people realize that the notions of ‘bourgeoisie’ and ‘proletariat’ are in the last analysis only mental constructions, and that they are all part of one and the same people.”

Now that all of Hitler’s social achievements have been destroyed by the world upheaval of 1945, and the young people of Europe are wandering without faith and without a vision of the future, the evocation of that epic of youth is almost unreal. And yet the writings of important persons, of foreigners who bore no love for Germany in their hearts, do still exist. One of the most significant of these testimonies is the statement the ambassador of Great Britain at Berlin made after having seen the young men march by with their shining spades: „Upon my return to London, I shall do everything in my power to introduce an equivalent of the *Arbeitsdienst* in England.”

The British diplomat, in his „definitive report,” even added these significant lines: „The ‘*Kraft durch Freude*’ (‘Strength Through Joy’) movement, the care taken for the physical education of the nation, and, above all, the Labor Service organization are typical examples of what a benevolent dictatorship can achieve.... It would be idle to deny the importance of what the man has done who has given the German people back their self-respect and a disciplined order.”

Young men so prepared could not but form the most intrepid and the most idealistic of warriors. They overran Europe in 1939, 1940 and 1941, not just with the support of their tanks, but sustained by their ideal – an ideal that no longer existed in the opposing troops. Faith is the best of weapons.

The spirit of the new Wehrmacht was intensely marked by the spiritual development that these hundreds of thousands of young men had experienced in their youth and labor camps. Just as the work was an honor, being a soldier had become an honor. Only young men of unblemished morals were admitted to the army. You didn’t get shoved in wholesale. You were selected. Anyone who had undergone a „dishonorable conviction” was excluded. A detail that must be considered most astonishing in view of the political explosion that called forth Hitlerism in Germany: the young soldiers, during their entire military service, had to abstain completely from all political activities. If they were members of the National Socialist party they ceased being registered as a member for the duration of their

service.

It has been said repeatedly that Hitler would use any means to get votes at election time. Well, he himself prohibited the soldiers, almost all of whom were from the *Hitlerjugend*, from voting or taking part in a referendum. That was 500,000 votes, later more than a million votes, he shunted aside that he could easily have garnered. Hitler forbade his soldiers access to the ballot box in order that the army might form but a single unit, a single thought, and a single destiny.

Thus, possessing neither the mighty Maginot Line, nor the enormous troop strength of the French, the Czechs, the English and the Poles, nor the 10,000 armored units of the Soviets, Hitler was in the process of building the most modern army in the world; smaller in numbers certainly than the others, but incomparable in spirit. Nothing like it existed anywhere.

The old generals grumbled now and then. Hitler made them uncomfortable. The tilting chairs in their offices were softer than the gun-turrets of tanks. But they felt overwhelmed by the sacred fire of all this youth. They remained silent.

Hitler, too, remained silent. His mortar was not yet hardened. Too violent a shock and the whole edifice might come down.

At that year's end of 1936, Hitler's political and social achievements alone were stabilized. They were there for all to see and were found astonishing. They piqued the curiosity of foreigners. Many came from abroad to examine the phenomenon.

The great world gathering in Berlin at the Olympic Games of 1936 was going to show the degree to which, on discovering the new Germany, foreigners felt as though caught by a magnet.



Both the 1936 winter and summer games were held in Germany, the last year that both Olympics were held in the same country. Twenty-eight countries participated, and German athletes took six gold medals, second only to Norwegian athletes, who took 15.

CHAPTER 51

HITLER AND THE OLYMPICS

On Aug. 1, 1936, amid decorations of a grandeur never before known, Adolf Hitler was going to inaugurate the Olympic games at Berlin. „They mark a high point, a sort of apotheosis for Hitler and for the Third Reich,“ wrote the French ambassador. For four years and throughout the world the leader of the new Germany had been pursued by an envious and frenzied anti-fascism. Particularly relentless in that pursuit were the communications media of the Jewish lobby, the absolute master – even then – of the large-circulation newspapers and the big international news agencies.

The „Nuremberg Laws“ only 10 months before the Berlin Olympics had marked one of the summits of anti-Hitler agitation.

Strange as it may seem, these „Nuremberg Laws“ had recognized the Jews as Jews – as Jews having rights of their own, but also, obviously, duties. For an Israelite necessarily does not have just rights, especially if he is enjoying the hospitality of a foreign country and the advantages the latter provides.

The Germans of 1935 meant to consider the race the Jews are so proud of as a specific race.

So what of that? What else did the Jews do in 1948 when they set up the state of Israel? They established, in their fundamental Mosaic laws, the preeminence of their race, admitting non-Jews only as foreigners or as subordinates – the Palestinians especially – who remain distinct from the Jewish community.

From before the time of Christ their millenary race had spread its tentacles everywhere in the world. Jews have always preserved their ethnic characteristics with the greatest rigor. Even in Israel the Jews see to the most severe maintenance of their morals and customs, jealously protecting the strict purity of their blood. That has been at the very basis of their historic survival. Their „religion“ always opposes, often even with extraordinary intolerance, any interbreeding with other races.

That being so, what gives the Israelites the right wherever they are abroad to claim to possess at the same time their own nationality and the nationality of the others? A Japanese in Berlin was not at the same time both a German and a Japanese. Is a Frenchman in Tel Aviv both a Frenchman and an Israeli?

The fury with which Jewish racism stirred up the whole world against Hitler would soon have a boomerang effect and provoke the explosion in September 1939 of World War II, in which the Jewish race would be the first to pay the consequences.

However, in August of 1936 there were still a good many reasonable men who retained their composure. Millions of undecided Europeans asked themselves questions. What was Hitler all about?

Hitler's rumbling voice gave the shivers to millions of non-Germans listening to the radio. The man was an enormous question mark. Thousands were curious to know more about him.

That explains why countless foreigners flocked to Berlin on Aug. 1, 1936 at the opening of the Olympic Games. They came to see the athletes. They came above all to see what this new, powerful, fascinating Germany they'd heard so much bad about was really like. They vaguely felt that the bill of indictment had to have been exaggerated. They even began to feel a certain mistrust in the matter. They wanted to be able on the occasion of these Olympic Games to get a good look at Hitler right on the spot „Hitler,” the ambassador of France at Berlin, M. Andre François-Poncet, explained, „has impressed Europe as being an extraordinary person. He not only inspires fear or aversion; he excites curiosity; he awakens sympathy; his prestige is growing; and the force of attraction that emanates from him is felt beyond the bounds of his own country. Kings, princes, illustrious visitors are thronging into the capital of the Reich, less perhaps to attend the sporting events that are to take place here than to draw near to this man of fate who appears to have the destiny of the continent in his hands, to have a close look at this Germany that he has, in his irresistible embrace, transformed and galvanized. And everyone here, in the presence of organization without deficiencies, order and discipline without a flaw, and prodigality without limits, goes into raptures. As a matter of fact, the tableau is magnificent.”

An enormous stadium – the biggest in the world – capable of holding one hundred and ten thousand spectators, had been built amid the forests and lakes west of Berlin.

„The stadium,” François-Poncet goes on, „seen from inside, is strikingly beautiful. Large approaches permit the crowds to fill it and to leave it in a few moments without a crush. It has been provided with all the fittings and improvements suited to its purpose. The locker rooms for the athletes, installations reserved for the press, restaurants, the tribune for the authorities, all leave nothing to be desired, while the reddish brown sand of the track, the striking green of the grass, and the soft gray of the tiers compose a harmony of colors that tempts the eyes.”

Hitler had even intended for this grandiose stadium to be built of sandstone and marble; only the hurry had necessitated, against his will, the use of cement.

This stadium, larger than the Coliseum of the Romans, was just one of the grandiose buildings that Hitler wished to bestow upon the Third Reich. Already at the time he had begun a new chancellery, with grandiose drawing rooms, fine mosaics, columns worthy of Luxor, that from 1938 forward would be the most imposing – and beyond a doubt the most beautiful – of the seats of government of all the heads of state in the world.

Other impressive palaces would house the Ministry of the Wehrmacht and that of the air force. The stadium in the National Socialist Congress center at Nuremberg, whose construction Hitler had ordered, would accommodate 400,000 persons.

But it was Berlin above all that would be marked by grandeur. Hitler wished to transform that rather commonplace and at times even shabby capital from top to bottom. The plans he himself sketched still exist. They were breathtaking. Crossing the new capital there was to be an avenue five kilometers long lined with multiple and splendid buildings extending over an area of several million square meters: ministries, the residence of the Führer, a group of diplomatic residences with flat roofs covered with immense terraces of gardens and foliage growing in soil three meters deep. The triumphal arch spanning the avenue was to be eighty meters high. The whole was to be dominated by the most imposing dome on Earth, rising 300 meters high and capable of accommodating 180,000 people.

This was not a question of megalomania on Hitler's part.

He had personally retained very modest ways, continuing to keep his little five-room apartment in Munich, surrounded by other tenants, at the top of a miserable flight of stairs. It was there in 1937 that he would receive Mussolini quite plainly, and then, in 1938, on the day after Munich, Mr. Chamberlain.

A plate of pasta, an egg, a few cakes with cream, water and a cup of herbal tea sufficed him.

But he wanted his century to leave a mark forever on future ages, so that even if in time his political work were effaced, grandiose marks of it would remain. It is stone and marble that mark historical greatness. Greece, mother of all civilizations, is the Acropolis. Rome, mistress of the world, is the Forum, the Coliseum, a hundred theaters, aqueducts and triumphal arches marking out the empire from Palmyra to Volubilis.

As with them, the monuments of the Third Reich would say for eternity what it

had been.

Hitler himself had painted a hundred sketches of this future empire of stones, often in minute detail. He insisted on choosing the materials personally: the red marbles, the limestones and the costly woods. To buy the most perfect blocks of stone from Sweden he would not hesitate to pay out every last scrap of foreign currency. He spent hours studying every model.

The world could collapse, but a thousand years after him they would find grandiose vestiges of his century, like the pyramids standing alone but immortal in their moving sea of sand.

The spectators of the Olympic games in Berlin had thus stepped right into magnificence.

Hitler's car had traversed the 15 kilometers of the „Triumphal Way“ leading to the stadium, applauded by a crowd such as Berlin had never known and which, at considerable effort, contained 40,000 policemen on duty at the time.

One hundred thousand spectators standing with arms extended had cheered him at his arrival while trumpets sounded a striking salute. The runner carrying the Olympic torch had entered the stadium and transferred the sacred flame to the high torchère that would burn until the end of the games. Then there appeared the chorus of 3,000 members directed by Richard Strauss, the greatest musician of the century. They sang *Deutschland Über Alles* and the *Horst Wessel Lied* followed immediately by *The Olympic Hymn* that Strauss had composed especially for this grandiose world festival.

Buzzing around Hitler was a swarm of princes, kings, and prominent personalities from all over the planet: Boris, king of Bulgaria; the crown prince of Italy; Marie Jose, his wife, the sister of the king of Belgium; the crown princes of Sweden, Greece and even faraway Japan; the sons of Mussolini; and noted aristocrats from Latin, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries.

Hitler did not miss a day of the games, waxing enthusiastic, congratulating the German woman who had beaten the record in the javelin throw as well as the Finns who had won the 10,000-meter trial.

Even with Jewish or black athletes, Hitler was perfectly friendly.

Helene Mayer, the women's fencing champion, was Jewish. So was Rudi Ball, a hockey champion. Both represented Germany.

With the dishonesty that is ever characteristic of anti-Hitlerism, quite a scandal was created concerning the American champion athlete, a black, Jesse Owens, winner of four gold medals, whom the Führer, it seemed, had refused to greet. Fifty years later this fable was still being repeated. Owens himself has insisted on denouncing the inanity of this tittle-tattle and has very handsomely acknowledged that Hitler had rendered him homage publicly and with kindness:

„When I passed before the chancellor,” the champion stated, „he rose and waved to me, and I returned his salute in the same manner. I believe that the reporters have given proof of their bad taste in criticizing him.”

The Olympic games came to an end on Aug. 16, 1936, in an atmosphere of triumph while Richard Strauss’s 3,000 choristers sang the hymn *The Games Are Ended*.

Germany could be proud of her successes, which brought proof of the renaissance of her youth in sport. One of the most noteworthy of the observers, the American historian John Toland, would write most fairly: „The games marked a nearly absolute Nazi triumph. The Germans won the greatest number of gold medals (35), and the majority of the silver and bronze medals besides; and what was a great surprise, they beat the Americans, who were left in second place with 57 points.”

„A still more important fact,” Toland adds, „a good many visitors returned from Germany charmed by the cordiality of their hosts and impressed by what they had seen of Hitler’s Reich. The success of the games was glorified afterward by a documentary in two parts filmed by Leni Riefenstahl that earned world acclaim... Any objective observer of the German reality,” Toland concludes, „cannot deny Hitler’s notable achievements.”

Hitler had made no secret of the fact that he wanted much more than external successes.

„The goal of our education,” he explained to all those visitors, „is the formation of character. We prefer 10 kilograms less of knowledge and 10 kilograms more of character.”

That, too, astonished the foreigners who had experienced the sophistical teachings of so many schools and universities that were turning out pompous graduates by the thousands, their heads stuffed with undigested postulates, flabby in body and will, lacking initiative: nullities facing the asperity of life’s hazardous battles.

CHAPTER 52

THE WORLD VISITS HITLER

In organizing the 1936 Olympic Games, Adolf Hitler had taken care that there should never be any exaggerated propaganda. During the weeks of the games political discussions had been all but eliminated from the daily life of the Reich. Foreigners were invited much more to festivities and theatrical productions than to political discussions, which the regime, sure of itself, made a deliberate effort to avoid.

The visitors, François-Poncet would later write, rather than going to meeting after meeting, attended a succession of festive parties of an expansiveness and grandeur that had never been known in Germany before Hitler; it was a question of which among the Berlin hotels would receive its guests with the most taste and splendor.

Marshal Goering had recreated for his guests, in the gardens of his ministry building, an enchanting 18th-century village that lacked neither artisan workshops, nor the farrier's forge, nor the inn and its crockery jugs, nor the relay of horses for the stagecoach. He had sumptuously received his guests at a table of unusual dimensions that has once more been described for us by the French ambassador, in great wonderment:

„At the Berlin opera, newly and lavishly hung with cream-colored satin, Goering had organized a sumptuous dinner party followed by a ball. Wooden flooring connected the stage to the hall; a profusion of footmen in red livery and powdered wigs, holding aloft lanterns on long poles, marked the table-area aisles swarming with a host of uniforms, glittering costumes and women in fancy dresses.”

Ribbentrop, for his part, had organized a reception at his splendid Dahlem villa, where he regaled seven hundred European guests with Pommery champagne under a gigantic tent that had been set up in the gardens.

As for Goebbels, he had invited more than 1,000 important people to poetic Peacock Isle for an Italian Night. It is clear from this choice how completely any narrow nationalism had been put aside.

Ambassador Schmidt recounts that „there was dining and dancing and... interpreting. Lots of speeches, toasts, private conversations: *‘Ach, Herr Schmidt, helfen Sie doch schnell einmal! Ich möchte mit Lord Londonderry sprechen!’* – *‘Monsieur Schmidt,*

deux mots seulement avec Dr Goebbels! – ‘Do you know where Goering is?’ That’s what I heard on all sides.”

The festivities at the Goebbels’s had very nearly been spoiled by bad weather:

„As it rained during the day, planes have been sent out in all directions looking for new supplies. The trees have become luminous candelabra. The *pontoniers* of the Reichswehr have thrown down a footbridge of boats to link the island with the land and with upright oars line the passageway for the guests, who are received and conducted to their places by a bevy of girls dressed as Renaissance pages. At midnight rockets shoot into the air in a spectacular fireworks display.

„Hitler,” Benoist-Méchin goes on to say, „receives their majesties and royal highnesses at his table. The splendid festivities fill the guests of honor, the diplomats, and eminent personalities from all over the world with astonishment and admiration.”

They were even taken for a ride above Germany in Zeppelins so that they could have a clear and close-up view of the new network of freeways.

„A real occasion” for them, they said.

Ambassador Schmidt, who was so attentive to Hitler at the time of his glory and yet would be so small-minded in denigration of him when it was all over, felt compelled to register the astonishment of these famous foreigners for whom he acted as interpreter as he moved about and mingled with the guests.

„Many of them warmly expressed their admiration for Hitler, for his efforts in favor of keeping the peace, and for the achievements of National Socialist Germany. Those days seemed to me then as a sort of apotheosis for Hitler and the Third Reich. I could clearly see in the course of these conversations, which were usually quite short, that the foreigners almost without exception regarded Hitler with great interest, not to mention with the greatest admiration.

„It was a fantastic spectacle,” he said in conclusion, „and everyone who was there, whether later friendly or in the enemy camp, still remembers it today.”

Throughout that year of 1936 which passed so easily from the great tumult of the reoccupation of the Rhineland and the uproar about the „Nuremberg Laws” to the footmen in red Every and powdered wigs of the dazzling festivities of the Olympic Games, there was a succession of visits of very prominent persons from abroad, from French Minister Bastide and the governor of the Bank of France, Labeyrie, to Lord Londonderry, the British air secretary, and Sir Robert Vansittart,

permanent secretary of the Foreign Office.

Ambassador/interpreter Schmidt wrote relative to these multiple conversations: „They confirmed that foreigners, at least those who came to Germany that year, still considered Hitler with a growing and not at all disparaging interest.“

Afterward many of those visitors would change their minds when they saw that peaceful and hardworking Germany was on the way to becoming the first power on the continent, thus treading on the toes of the proprietors of the past, who did not recognize the right of the modern world to change drivers.

When the Reich had become twice the size of France in terms of population – after reuniting all her separate sons with the liberation of the Austrians and the Sudeten Germans in 1938 and 1939 – and the Balkans had become wide-open territory for the economic expansion of the Third Reich, then the compliments were succeeded by the gnashing of teeth.

They were willing to admire Hitler, but only on condition that he never surpass by so much as a millimeter the level marked on the Franco- British standard.

In 1936, before those outbursts of jealousy, Germany's recovery, progressing within four years from decay to rebirth, evoked sincere and lively astonishment from every unprejudiced visitor.

In that summer of 1936, addressing his own people as well as those abroad, Hitler had been able, proudly but without vain ostentation, to draw up his balance sheet as a successful administrator:

How our enemies would have laughed if I had said to them on Jan. 30, 1933 that at the end of four years the number of German unemployed would be down to less than a million; that the forced expropriation of our countrymen would have come to an end; that our income from agriculture would be greater than in any peacetime year in our history;

That our annual national income would go from 41 to 56 billion marks;

That the German middle class and artisan class would experience an unimagined development;

That our commerce would be reborn;

That our ports would no longer be ships' graveyards, and that in 1936, in our own German shipyards, 640,000 tons of new shipping would be under construction;

That innumerable factories would have not just doubled, but tripled and

quadrupled the volume of their production;

That the Krupp establishments would know the full-time roar of the rolling mills and power hammers;

And that in all these enterprises, the principal driving force of the endeavor would be not the unscrupulous gain of the individual but the devotion of all for the good of the nation;

That the automobile factories would not just come out of their lethargy but grow in such dizzying fashion that the output of cars, which was at 46,000 in 1932, would rise to 250,000 in 1936; that in four years the deficits of the nation and of the municipalities would be wiped out, and that the surplus in tax revenues would reach 5 billion marks annually;

That our railroads would be soundly managed and our trains the fastest in the world;

That the German Reich would be provided with a network of roads whose quality and beauty surpass anything of this kind ever constructed since the beginning of civilization;

That of the 7,000 kilometers of freeway planned, 1,000 kilometers would already be open for traffic and more than 4,000 under construction barely four years later;

That whole working-class housing developments, containing hundreds of thousands of new houses, would be rising out of the ground;

That hundreds and hundreds of new bridges would span the valleys and rivers;

That the German theater and German music would celebrate a resurrection worthy of the immortal masterpieces of our past;

That the entire German nation would participate in this prodigious spiritual renewal;

And that all this would be accomplished without a single Jew having any part in the directing of the nation.

Yes, I'll say it again: what would the answer of our enemies have been if I had told them that all this would be a reality in less than four years?

Nevertheless, today, it has all been accomplished, and you have only to look around you to convince yourself it is true.

The most unexpected visitor Hitler received in the autumn of 1936, after this official statement, had been Germany's most relentless enemy during World War I,

Lloyd George, the former British prime minister, the very same man who, on the day after the armistice, had called for hanging the Kaiser and for squeezing the German lemon „until the pips squeak.”

He had also turned up in Berchtesgaden after Röhm had been eliminated and after the promulgation on Nov. 15, 1935 of the „anti-Jewish” Nuremberg Laws.

He did not seem to be the least disconcerted by them.

He would not change sides either until the Reich, after its complete reunification in 1938, had begun to weigh too heavy in the scales with which her gracious British majesty measured the weight of various peoples.

In September of 1936, when Lloyd George visited Hitler, he was overflowing with amiability.

Hitler, hand out to welcome him: „I am especially glad to receive the man whom we here in Germany have always considered the real victor of the World War.” Lloyd George, beaming: „I consider myself very fortunate to meet the man who, after the defeat, has known how to get the German people behind him and going back uphill.”

They spent the whole September afternoon together until seven o’clock in the evening, long evoking memories of the war when the then unknown corporal had so often fought against the Tommies of Lloyd George.

Then they talked politics.

Lloyd George accepted the responsibility for the blame Hitler laid on the alliances that had been so fatal for the peace of Europe in 1914 and which the anti-Fascists of 1936 in Paris, Prague and Moscow wanted to setup once more, this time against the Third Reich.

„They have always been a dangerous thing,” said Lloyd George spiritedly, shaking his mop of white hair. „They widened the last war like a prairie fire. Without them the conflict might have been localized.”

Similarly he nodded assent when Hitler found fault with the unreasoning plots of foreign military staff officers who were politically ill informed and had nothing but battles in mind. In London, these „staff talks” had opposed his offers aimed at a rapprochement between the German and British first cousins. Lloyd George deplored the fact that his efforts had been „unhappily thwarted.”

The conversation then turned to the social revolution of the Third Reich. Lloyd George said: „National Socialism has undertaken experiments in this area that are of great interest to England.“

Hitler replied: „It is not a question of experiments, but of a plan that has matured over a long period of time.“

Lloyd George said he was convinced of it, „with a warm eloquence that bordered on enthusiasm,” Schmidt reports. „He (Lloyd George) spoke of the measures taken to eliminate unemployment, of sickness insurance, social welfare work, and the use of leisure time. He had already looked over a number of projects completed by the ‘Labor Front’ and seemed very impressed by what he had seen.... The old victor of World War I ended his visit with the young dictator of the Third Reich. They agreed to meet again the next day at teatime, when Lloyd George planned to bring his daughter Megan,” Schmidt relates.

The young Megan was waiting impatiently for her father when he returned to his Berchtesgaden hotel.

When she saw him get out of the Führer’s car, he was so radiant, his eyes so sparkling and alive, and his gait made so youthful by the pleasure of his interview, that Megan laughed and raising her arm said: „*Heil Hitler*“

The old Welshman stopped short and grew solemn. He looked straight at his daughter „You’re right, *Heil Hitler*,” he replied. „I’ll say it myself, because he is truly a great man.“

Upon his return to England, Lloyd George wrote for *The Daily Express* these lines that seem unprecedented to anyone reading them after half a century of incessant anti-Hitler brainwashing: „Hitler has singlehandedly lifted Germany out of the depths. He is a born leader, a dynamic personality with a determined will and a brave heart whom the old trust and the young idolize.” Arnold Toynbee, the celebrated British historian, also „returned from Germany convinced of Hitler’s peaceful intentions.“

Amid the fireworks, the festivities, the gold medals, Hitler had nonetheless discreetly devoted the better part of his time to going forward with the creation of his Wehrmacht.

To be sure, it was not with the intention of ever hurling it against Paris. Much less against London. That ought to have been clear to everyone for some years. But the Soviet problem more and more disturbed him; in truth, it haunted him. Stalin’s armies at his doorstep in that autumn of 1936, as he reminded himself every hour of

the day, were four times as strong as his own in men and 10 times as strong in tanks.

Hitler was in no way ready to face the enormous power of the USSR. The return to conscription, national military service, the reconstruction of the Wehrmacht, tentatively set at 36 divisions, all dated only from the preceding year.

His orders concerning the war economy plan that he had commissioned Goering to develop – the four-year plan – dated from that very summer.

If Stalin had not killed Marshal Tukhachevsky and 30,000 officers of his armies, he could have destroyed Hitler before he had reached a minimum of power. That liquidation had forced a pause on the part of the Russians in the nick of time.

But Stalin was a Communist, which means he intended to conquer the world. He was also, in another aspect, a successor of the czars, an imperialist like the great Russian conquerors of former days.

The elimination of Tukhachevsky had simply staved things off for a time. Hitler needed to make haste. He had at most only a few years in which to achieve the complete reunification of the Germans inside the Reich (that was done) and the Germans outside (still to do). The 10 million compatriots between the Danube and the foothills of the Sudetens would not be gathered in lightly or without the possibility of conflict.

The year 1937, a year of peace, would in reality be the armed vigil before Hitler entered forbidden territory.



Hitler waves to the crowd at one of the many Nuremberg Party Days held during his tenure as German leader.

CHAPTER 53

NUREMBERG IN THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST MIND

The National Socialist Congress had become an annual session of a giant parliament composed of a million and a half representatives of the people, coming from the most varied regions. Politically, it was the most „colossal“ (as the Germans say) expression of democracy that had ever been organized anywhere in the world. Such an event had never before been seen, and nothing like it would ever afterward be seen again. The Nuremberg Congress was a unique phenomenon in the political history of Europe.

Every year in the month of September, Nuremberg became the mecca of National Socialism. In 1927 it was only a handful of militants following a virtually unknown Adolf Hitler who met there. In 1933 they came in a crowd of 400,000. In 1937 they were a million and a half. From every point of view, these gatherings were astounding.

Just to transport these million and a half deputies of the nation, a fantastic amount of railroad equipment had to be mobilized: 4,000 special trains, tens of thousands of railroad cars lined up like ants on dozens of kilometers of track. Then that immense host of people had to be received, to be given directions and to be fed.

All the hotels of Nuremberg together could hardly shelter a hundredth part of the participants. And so entire towns of thousands of tents were erected to shelter these crowds that were equivalent in number to a hundred divisions of infantry.

They would need not just a roof, but also hundreds of mobile kitchens, sanitary facilities, first aid stations and information booths, and thousands of Red Cross nurses. And all that provided with mathematical precision. Every one of these human ants had to be able to find his tent, his cot and his food by knowing exactly at every minute where he had to go, how he was to get there and for what purpose.

Arriving from the most faraway villages of the Reich, often knowing nothing of the town of Nuremberg, the million and a half participants couldn't turn around without knowing the exact geographic point and the exact hour where and when, for example, a youth would find the Grand Army of Youth, a woman her women's organizations, the militant his SA column, or the worker his professional organization or his section of the Labor Front.

Only German discipline, the German genius for organization, could keep this

gigantic conglomeration of human beings from becoming entangled in impossible disorder. Year after year there would be more participants attending. And year after year the arrival, the stay, the departure of this fantastic migration would be more flawless.

Moving two or three army corps took a Gen. Gamelin two or three weeks of shilly-shallying. Here, in just a few hours, the equivalent of the whole French peacetime army was got under way. A formidable lesson for future military operations.

The proof was given and repeated each year that it was perfectly possible to transport a million and a half soldiers in a matter of hours without the slightest hitch; that the railroads were capable of moving the entire German army from one end of the country to the other on schedule to within a quarter of an hour. Where else had a maneuver like that ever been organized and performed with such mathematical success?

On the return, just as on the arrival, the hundreds of divisions of civilians were lodged and fed. Their participation was orchestrated. We can look at photos of the period, study each sequence of the admirable film *Triumph of the Will* produced by Leni Riefenstahl in 1934: each human formation is perfectly aligned, each avenue is clear, like a stream. Not even a stray dog in the empty space. Not a single lamp that isn't burning.

The ceremonies unfolded with more majesty than at Saint Peter's in Rome.

Hitler comes forward, absolutely alone, on a paved avenue more than a hundred yards wide, amid 30,000 flags like flames, between a million and half men and women holding their breath.

Writes French historian Benoist-Méchin:

Nothing has been omitted to obtain the desired effect, a parade of a hundred thousand SA, pounding the pavements of the town for five hours, a forest of standards in which the blood-red emblems and the eagles of the party dominate, deafening fanfares, salvos of artillery, torchlight tattoos uncoiling their serpent of fire between the illuminated facades of the medieval town, batteries of searchlights aimed skyward, weaving a vault of light above the Luitpoldshain amphitheater: everything contributes to create an impression of ordered power from which the most skeptical visitors return astounded. It is impossible to resist this swirl of colors and songs and light whose intensity no report, no film will ever reproduce. For nearly a week the crowd has been swimming, rolling in a tidal wave of emotion.

This Frenchman is not the only one to describe that emotion. Many others have done it. And the agreement of these foreign witnesses is eloquent. What struck them the most were the preoccupation with, the concern for, the unalterable rites, and the almost religious aspect of the succession of the ceremonies.

For Hitler, who entered Nuremberg to the ringing of all the bells of the town, the basis of all faith was dogma. And dogma by nature is immutable and eternal. Truth can never change its face. To touch it up would be to detract from the mystery, to bring it in question. Everything in the history of National Socialism would be marked not only by the concern for greatness but by the supreme immutability of the gestures which sanctify the ideal, the conviction, the bond, the gift.

Every detail had been fixed forever. The speaker's platform, atop 30 granite steps, rose up like a warship. It stood out against a background of bright light. It was crowned with oak leaves surrounding a hooked cross worked with gold. The stadium, where a million and a half faithful supporters breathlessly waited, was as vast as a metropolis. The grandstands themselves could hold 150,000 guests.

During the course of the week, the covered auditorium harbored by turns the youth, the women, the country people, and the factory workers, the SS and the SA. Hitler spoke before them 15 to 20 times during those days.

The stadium itself was gigantic, surrounded by columns three times as tall as those of the Acropolis. The columns were surmounted by eagles of granite and joined together by tens of thousands of flaming banners with swastikas turning in their solar disks. Streams of blue vapor rose from tall basins.

Hitler had even invented an entirely new form of architecture that was made not of stone but of light. He'd had hundreds of air defense beacons installed on the four sides of the giant site. Their beams of light rose up very high and very straight in the night like the pillars of an unreal cathedral. It was quite a fabulous imaginary construction, worthy of Zeus, master of light and of the night of the heavens. Then, like a prophet, Hitler came forward.

Here is how Robert Brasillach, the most inspired French poet of the century, describes Hitler upon his podium:

Here's the man now standing upon the rostrum. Then the flags unfurl. No singing, no rolling of the drums. A most extraordinary silence reigns when, from the edge of the stadium, before each of the spaces separating the brownshirt groups, the first ranks of standard-bearers emerge. The only light is that of the cathedral, blue and unreal, above which one sees butterflies spiraling: airplanes perhaps or simply dust. But a spotlight beam has alighted

on the flags, emphasizing the red mass of them and following them as they advance.

Are they advancing? One wishes rather to say that they flow. That they flow like the flow of crimson lava, irresistibly, in an enormous gliding rush, to fill the gaps prepared in advance in the brown granite. Their majestic advance lasts nearly 20 minutes. And it is only when they are close to us that we hear the muffled sound of their tread. Up to the minute when they come to a halt at the feet of the standing chancellor, silence has prevailed. A supernatural and unearthly silence, like the silence for astronomers of something seen on another planet. Beneath the blue-streaked vault reaching to the clouds, the broad red streams of lava are now grown still. I do not believe I have ever in my life seen a more prodigious spectacle.

That prodigious spectacle was not born of chance, but from the mind of an organizer and an artist of genius.

Each day had its special program devoted to a quite distinct sector of the public. Another Frenchman, the historian Andre Brissaud, who is aggressive and often unjust when he speaks of Hitler, has also described one of these ceremonies which he calls [a] „Hitler service“:

Under the blazing Sun 52,000 young men of the Labor Service present their shovels in a virile offertory. Then, when they resume their at-ease position, one of their leaders, facing them at the foot of the tribune, snaps:

„Where do you come from, comrade?“

A voice from that host of brownshirts responds:

„From Thuringen.“ (Thuringia)

„Where do you come from, comrade?“

„From Hesse.“

„Where do you come from, comrade?“

„From Schlesien.“ (Silesia)

Then come the traditional questions:

„Are you ready to bring fertility to German soil?“

Fifty-two thousand young men respond with a single voice:

„We are ready.“

„Are you ready to make every sacrifice for the Reich?“

„We are ready.“

This singular and impressive spoken chorus lasts nearly 20 minutes.

Afterward the 52,000 men in brown, with much fervor and gravity, sing their song of heroes and other things as well.

The drum rolls.

Silence is established. They meditate. They evoke the dead, the soul of the party and of the nation as one.

Finally, the Führer speaks, bringing the collective emotion to a white heat. Transported by passion, his nostrils quivering, his eyes flashing, Hitler is the Nazi faith. The violence, the fierce energy, the triumph of the will. His voice, broadcast by loudspeakers, takes on a superhuman dimension. A hypnotic phenomenon takes place – gigantic, stupefying.

Another day it was the ceremonial of the cult of the „flag of the blood“ (Blutfahne), the standard that was soaked with the blood of Hitler’s companions on Nov. 11, 1923, the day after the Munich putsch, when the Bavarian police killed seven of the National Socialists around the young Führer. The new flags received the consecration of the „flag of the martyrs“ at the foot of the monument commemorating them.

The German author Joaquim Fest, a notorious anti-Nazi, has described this ceremony:

Finally, starting from the „Luitpoldshain“ accompanied by two disciples keeping their proper distance, Hitler marched to the monument, taking the wide ribbon of concrete (now called the „Avenue of the Führer“) between several hundred thousand men of the SA and the SS lined up in stately array. While the flags were lowered, Hitler was motionless, deeply immersed in his thoughts, like a heraldic figure.

Citing an official account, Fest adds:

The beams of 150 gigantic searchlights pierced the overcast sky of a gray-black night. High in the air, on the surface of the clouds, the shafts of light came together to form the figure of a square.... The image is gripping.... Stirred by a light wind, the flags framing the stands tremble slightly in the sparkling light. The main speaker’s platform comes into view in a blaze of light ... To the right and to the left, flames shoot out of immense cups supported by pillars. From the opposite stands, on command, a flood of more than 30,000 flags pours toward the center, the tips of the staffs and the fringes of silver glittering in the

illumination of the searchlights.

As always, Hitler was the first victim of this production made of light, of crowds, of symmetry and of „life’s tragic awareness.” It was precisely in these orations made before the „first militants” and after the minute of silence observed in honor of the dead that Hitler frequently found his speech marked by a sort of exaltation and rapture: on these occasions and in a few extraordinary words, he has celebrated a sort of mystic communion before the spotlights sweep down on the center of the stage, and the flags, the uniforms and the musical instruments come ablaze in flashes of red, silver and gold.

A newspaper, *Niederelbischen Tageblatt*, has preserved some of these invocations. [Note: this paragraph is lined out in the original French text. We put it back in because we find the unguided leap to the following paragraphs confusing without it – Ed.] Hitler exclaimed:

I have always had the feeling that for as long as the gift of life is granted a man, he must retain his nostalgia for those with whom he has fashioned his life. What would my life be without you? That you have found me and believe in me has given your life a new significance and imposed new duties on you. And that I have found you, that alone has made my life and my struggle possible.

And this:

How could we not feel in this hour the miracle that has brought us together? You heard a man’s voice in the past, and it struck your heart, it awakened you, and you have followed that voice. You have followed it for years without even having seen the man who had that voice. You have only heard a voice, and you have followed it.

The tone of the speeches had messianic echoes. Hitler added:

We all meet here again, and the miracle of this meeting fills our souls. Not every one of you can see me, and I cannot see each of you, but I feel you and you feel me. Is it not faith in our people that has made big men of us from small, rich from poor; and that, discouraged and faltering though we were, has made brave and valiant men of us?

At the end of a week it was time for the parting of this million and a half men and women who had renewed their vows as if they had been crusaders, or members of a religious order.

Once again it is the French poet Robert Brasillach who evokes this hour of departure:

Deutschland Über Alles is sung and the *Hoist Wessel Lied* soaring with the spirit of comrades killed by the Red Front and by the reactionaries – and the song of the soldiers of the war.

„I had a comrade,

„A better one I'll never have....”

Then still other songs, composed for the congress, which harmonize easily with the fresh night, the gravity of the hour, the many beautiful and melancholy voices, and with all the musical enchantment without which Germany can conceive nothing, neither religion nor fatherland, nor war, nor politics nor sacrifice.

Brissaud adds: „Then there is the interminable torchlight tattoo through the streets of Nuremberg. Groups of the SA, of the Hitler Youth, or of the SS march tirelessly by, lighted only by the gleam of their torches.“

Like everyone else, some of the most prominent persons of distinction from abroad were seized by the popular wave.

The entire diplomatic corps was invited by Hitler and put up in the Nuremberg station itself in two sumptuous special trains provided with club cars, dining cars, sleeping cars, bathrooms and even hairdressing salons.

The French ambassador, François-Poncet, even spoke to the Congress of 1937. He would sum up his feelings almost with dread:

During those eight days, Nuremberg was a town given over completely to joy, an enchanted town, almost a town that escaped from reality. That atmosphere, combined with the beauty of the spectacles and the magnificent hospitality, greatly impressed the foreigners. It created an impression very difficult to resist. When they went back home, they were captivated and won over.

The ambassador/interpreter Paul Schmidt, commissioned to escort the rich and famous, has described the sensation:

On the day when Hitler made his grand triumphal promenade at Nuremberg, I happened to be in a open car with the most important French and English guests, only a few meters behind the dictator's car.... We could thus observe him from very close up and also especially the crowds cheering him from both sides of the road.

The procession, triumphal in the true sense of the word, took more than

an hour to make its way through the old town. The impression produced by these masses of people cheering Hitler as though in ecstasy was extraordinarily powerful. Once again I noted with what an expression of devotion, with what biblical trust, the people gazed on Hitler, seeming to be under a magic spell. The thousands and thousands of spectators all along the route were as though seized by a collective rapture at the sight of him. They held out their arms and saluted him with rousing shouts. Moving along for an hour in the middle of this frenzied outburst was a real physical ordeal, which left us exhausted at the end of the trip. All power of moral resistance seemed paralyzed; we almost had the feeling of having to restrain ourselves to keep from joining in with the general ecstasy.... I could see that the English and the French often had tears in their eyes from the effects of the inner emotions caused by all they were seeing and hearing. Even journalists as *blase* as Jules Sauerwein of *Le Matin* and Ward Price of *The Daily Mail*, who were in my car, were literally groggy when we arrived at the end of the route.

The American journalist Richard Helms, special envoy of the United Press, who managed to get to the Nuremberg palace, where Hitler was receiving his guests at the end of the festivities, would make this droll comment: „When I got there myself, I was suffering from megalomania. I decided that I must be nine feet tall even though the cheers had not been addressed to me.”

Benoist-Méchin concluded:

When all is said and done, what we saw at Nuremberg was no longer the party; it was the entire German nation offering itself the spectacle of its own rediscovered power.... What was forged here was a mystique powerful enough to triumph over individual feelings and cast them in the crucible of a single faith.

At the end of four years of stubborn struggle, Hitler had thus transformed his people.

He had made a unity of them, hard as steel.

Even the army would be welded to that unity henceforth: the Wehrmacht spent eight days at Nuremberg fraternizing with the people, parading jointly with them with their new tanks, their new cannon and above all with their new spirit..

Hauled out of the wreckage of 1918, Germany at year's end in 1937 had a greater solidarity than ever before in her history. The first stage of the Hitler revolution was now completed.

From the Nuremberg stadium Hitler gazed down at his vibrant people. He had completed their political unification: no longer were there either states or parties locked in petty rivalry; their social unification: the classes, formerly rivals, now formed just one team; their military unification: there was now just one armed force, built for all, open to all. Still to be achieved was the racial and geographical unification.

Beyond the border to the southeast stood 10 million Germans of Austria and the Sudetens, already conquered politically, and waiting impatiently for their church bells to sound the German hour.

Hitler, creator of the Greater Reich, was moving toward them in the full assurance of their unanimity, his eyes fixed on the destiny to be subdued....

PHOTO SECTION



Left, Degrelle was a vibrant and energetic Catholic Nationalist whose Rexist movement commanded more than a fifth of the Belgian electorate.



An advertisement to hear Degrelle speak. In 1930, Degrelle – a Belgian Walloon – founded the Rexist movement, based on the idea of Christus Rex, or Christ as King.



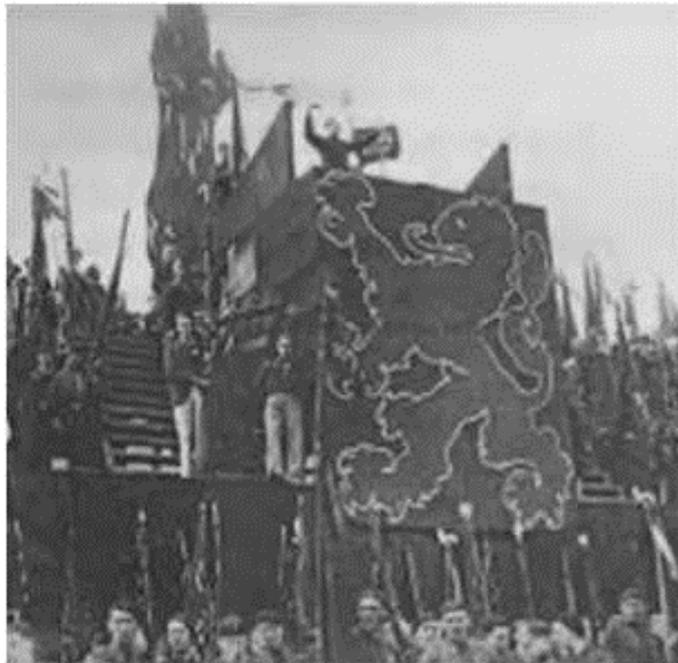
Degrelle salutes a cameraman during campaigning. His Rexist movement would command 30 percent of the vote in some provinces during the 1936 Belgian parliamentary elections.



Degrelle speaks to well-wishers from a train during a political campaign stop.



A rare picture of a bearded Degrelle.



Degrelte speaks to Flemish Belgians about the need to resist communism. Degrelle was tapped by the Germans to lead Belgium after the end of German occupation.



Here, Léon Degrelle is arrested by French police in Belgium, who suspected him of collaborating with the National Socialist government. He was detained in France until the collapse of that government, then liberated by the Germans. Then he enlisted in the German military.



Degrelle (conning down stairs) is shown at his brother-in-law's funeral during World War II.



Degrelle in leather jacket and the uniform of the Wallonian brigade of the Waffen-SS.



Degrelle speaks at Messeritz.



Here, Private Degrelle announces his enlistment in the Wallonian Brigade, urging his fellow Belgians to support the German war effort. Above right, the Belgian Walloons

were originally intended as a reconstituted Belgian Army, but were later absorbed into the Waffen-SS and deployed on the Eastern Front.



Degrelle, a radical Catholic politician who had helped preserve the Church against Bolshevism, was briefly ex-communicated by the Church's left-wing leadership for his support of fascism. He had his ex-communication lifted when it appeared the Church's allies in the West might lose the war. Here he and several of his men receive Holy Communion on the front lines.



Above Degrelle is surrounded by a mass of Belgian supporters.



Upon his liberation from a French prison, Degrelle joined the Volunteer SS Brigade Walloon as a private, but was quickly promoted and ended the war as Brigade Commander.





Degrelle decorates members of the SS Brigade Walloon who participated in the defense of Cherkassy, a Ukrainian city which they heroically fought before it was taken by the Soviets on Dec. 14, 1943.



Degrelle's family was kidnapped by the British and Americans after the war, and his children were separated and given new families and new names. He struggled to find them with the help of Spanish intelligence agents and friends in the remnants of European National Socialism. In the end, he was able to seize his children from their foster parents and reunite them with him in Spain.



Above, Degrelle appears with his daughter Anita in 1945. Below, Degrelle and a grownup Anita in Spain in the 1980s. Degrelle proudly attended her marriage in Spain.





Degrelle was condemned to death by firing squad in Belgium, but escaped to Spain, where he lived until his death in 1994. To avoid turning him over to the capitalist West and their collaborators, the Spanish gave Degrelle a new name and appointed him director of a state-owned construction company. The actor who played the fictional Zorro at the time was a big fan of Degrelle's.



Above left, Degrelle in the courtyard of his Spanish casa in Madrid. Right, Degrelle shows off the Ritterkreuz he was awarded by Adolf Hitler. „If I had a son, I'd wish him to be like you,“ Hitler told Degrelle.



Degrelle spent much of his late life studying and expanding on the idea of National Socialism. He was forever writing and recording his own lectures on the war. At the time of his death, he was still working on a huge project on World War II history.



Here, Degrelle works on a chapter of his *Hitler Democrat*, published by TBR in 2012. This is only one of 14 volumes Degrelle planned to publish on World War II.



Top, Gen. Degrelle donned his Waffen-SS uniform for this photo taken in the late 1980s. Degrelle achieved the rank of colonel in the German military. He was promoted to general at the close of the war by Heinrich Himmler but few recognized the promotion as Himmler had seen his duties diminished by that time. However, after the war he was promoted again to general by Spain's Francisco Franco. At the close of the war, Degrelle survived a near-fatal crash landing in his Heinkel 111 on the beach of La Concha in San Sebastian, Spain, in May 1945. He sought asylum from Spain.





This autographed photo of Adolf Hitler shaking hands with Léon Degrelle, snapped during world War II, was presented to TBR publisher Willis Carto and his wife in 1981 by Degrelle himself. Degrelle's notation reads: „For my friends Elisabeth and Willis Carto with all my affection, L. Degrelle.”