

When Hitler Hit the Ceiling

BANG! BANG! BANG! BANG! And again, Bang! and Bang!

The enormous Munich beer cellar, crowded with troubled Bavarians called together for a political mass-meeting at a time of stress, was thrown into the wildest confusion.



Some Say That He Draws His Power From the Faith of His Followers

'Twas the night of November 8, 1923.

At the peroration of a Monarchist speech, the hall had been invaded by rude, pistol-shooting young men.

Puffs of gunpowder smoke trailed to the ceiling, and its ominous odor killed the peaceful smells of tobacco and beer.

Shouts and screams, curses, commands and entreaties mingled with a scattering of incipient cheers for a solemn-faced young man in a quasi-military uniform who had been hoisted to the stage.

His "adjutants," who had rushed the door to get him in, firing their revolvers to overawe resistance, now pointed the smoking muzzles at the officials and speakers of the meeting.

THEY silenced von Kahr, virtual dictator of Bavaria, who was right in the middle of a burst of eloquence. Von Kahr was a royalist, but his young followers had been flocking into the swashbuckling organization of a fire-eating spellbinder named Hitler.

Factional feeling sprang to life, scores of arguments started, hoots were answered by "Hochs," which in turn provoked more hoots. And when this Donnybrook Fair was at its height—

Bang! "Handsome Adolf" was firing at the ceiling—Bang! Bang!—"to attract attention."

Nowadays Hitler can "attract attention" without firing a pistol. The new Chancellor of Germany couldn't lose the world's anxious attention if he tried. The peace of Germany—indirectly the peace of all nations—might easily trip over one hair-trigger act or one turn of policy as impulsive as a shot at a beer-hall ceiling. His muzzling of the German press,



*A posed photograph of Hitler (1925) by a man who would in later years serve as his personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffman.
(Image and text added)*

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and other strong-arm measures are already, as we shall see, reaping a crop of strife, not without bloodshed. Every sidelight on his character is important at this time, and the history of the "Beer Hall Putsch" reveals the Chancellor's quality at a less lucky stage of his ambitious career. As the crowd fell silent, he gave the Fascist salute. If it was good enough for Mussolini, it was good enough for Hitler.

"He uses it as an ordinary greeting," says a *Manchester Guardian* correspondent, "by drooping a rather soft, artistic hand back over his shoulder, then dropping it down again like a loose flipper," but on this historic occasion he flung out his arm with almost Mussolinian virility.

According to Emil Lengyel in "Hitler" (The Dial Press), he now used his pistol politely as a wand to wave Commissioner von Kahr and two other officials into an adjoining room, from which point we read on:

A "Proclamation to all Germans" was ready, waiting for distribution. It was signed in the name of the Provisional National Government by General Ludendorff, Adolf Hitler, General von Lossow, and Colonel von Seisser.

None of them knew anything about it except Hitler.

At the point of a pistol, Kahr, Lossow, and Seisser were to give their indorsement of the new national régime. Kahr was cast for the rôle of Regent Governor of Bavaria. General Ludendorff was to be Regent Governor of the entire Reich, and Hitler the Chancellor, both vested with dictatorial powers.

There were tears in Hitler's eyes when he sought to convince the three gentlemen that this was the psychological moment to accept the posts offered to them. Then he suggested having his decision verified by the crowd in the hall.

After addressing the audience he came back to report that the beer cellar indorsed his choice with delirious delight.

Meanwhile a gray automobile roared at high speed on the road from Wilhelmsstoehe to Munich. It halted in front of the beer hall and out of it jumped General Ludendorff.

"Every one must do one's duty," Hitler perorated.

"Right," commented Seisser, "but you've broken your promise. You were not to stage putsches now."

"But I have broken my promise in the interest of the Fatherland." Then, playing with his pistol, Hitler continued: "I have four shots here, three for you if you desert me and one for myself. Let me have a stein."

Ludendorff breezed in. General von Lossow "seemed small in the presence of the war lord." Hitler, at his trial some months later, testified, "We were all deeply moved. There were tears in the eyes of Lossow and Seisser." Reading on:

With a "Heil Hitler" from the Nazi "Storm Troops"



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This was a crying revolution. All four men shook hands and looked firmly into one another's eyes. Hitler, with tears in his eyes, sat down to draw up a manifesto. Since Ludendorff was coming along so nicely, he reduced the General to the rank of Minister of War.

"I suggest," he read to the audience, which was consuming immense quantities of beer, "that I be entrusted with the conduct of the policies of the provisional government of the Reich."

The inebriated patriots shouted hurrah. Hitler bowed in all directions. His voice rang clearly in the general din.

"To-morrow finds either a national government in Germany or us dead."

WHAT followed is summarized in the *New York American* by William P. Reed, in a series of Hitler stories copyrighted by Universal Service, Inc., of which Mr. Reed is foreign editor. Thus:

- Von Lossow and von Seisser left the beer cellar, ostensibly to carry out the Hitler program.

The first thing von Kahr did was to alarm Berlin and ask for help against Hitler. Von Lossow got in touch with the Reichsarmy. Hitler and Ludendorff were isolated. The "revolution" was a gigantic flop.

The Berlin Government proclaimed martial law. The Reichsarmy was sent to Munich.

At 2 A. M. the next day the Commander-in-Chief of the Reichsarmy presented an ultimatum to the Hitler forces. He demanded immediate, unconditional surrender. The ultimatum was spurned. Von Kahr thereupon signed a warrant ordering the immediate arrest of Ludendorff and Hitler.

That morning the Reichsarmy stormed the Ministry of War. The State forces lost one dead and ten wounded. Hitlerite losses were estimated at eight dead and twenty wounded.

The Reichsarmy swept the Hitlerites out of the War Ministry. They stormed the beer cellar, but Hitler escaped. He found refuge in the home of Dr. Ernst F. S. Hanfstaengel, Harvard University graduate. The Nazi chieftain has never forgotten the sanctuary extended him. Finally Hitler was arrested, convicted of rebellion, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment, but within six months he was freed.

IN that connection we find in a *Manchester Guardian* dispatch a telling contrast between the gallantry of the old war dog, Ludendorff, and the caution of "Handsome Adolf." Thus:

On the morrow they led their heavily armed men through the streets of Munich. The insurrection collapsed under the first volley of Bavarian police. Ludendorff, who had shown his courage in the assault on Liège nine years before, showed it again.

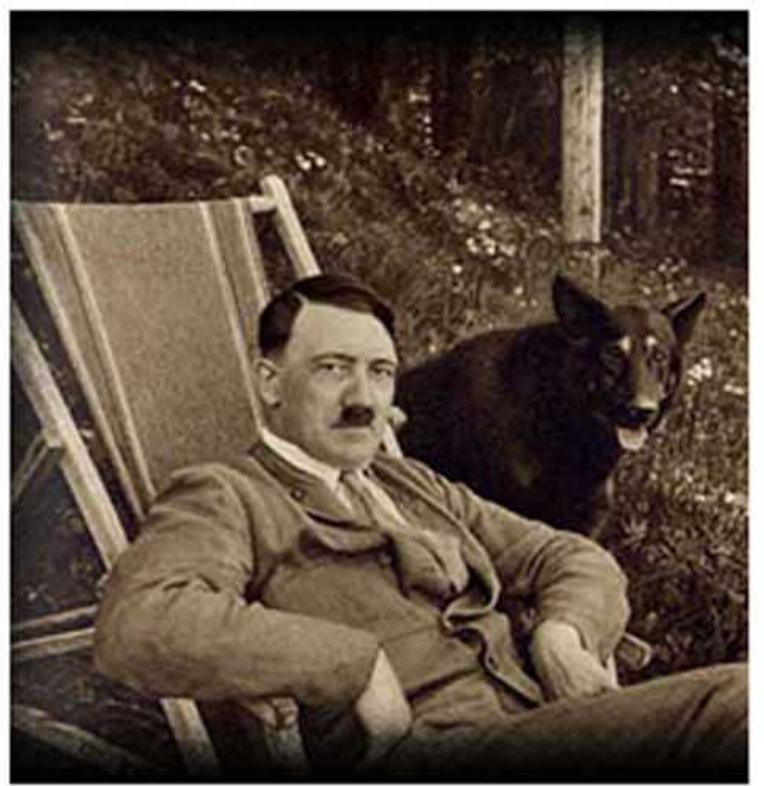
He marched proudly on, in a black coat and top-hat, right through the ranks of the police.

Hitler just vanished, and was not heard of again until several days afterward.

There was no "National Government" in Germany, yet he was still alive. But he dedicated his book, "My Fight," to the sixteen of his followers who were left lying dead when he and the others ran away.

Such was the farcical dénouement of the "Beer Hall Putsch." But the Hitler fortunes have taken a great leap since then, and when, the other day, he attained the German Chancellorship, in the line of succession from Bismarck, his personality and propensities suddenly became of enormous importance to the world. In the *Manchester Guardian* dispatch already quoted, we find some impressions of his oratorical style, which plays an important part in his influence on German youth. We get the idea that his intense earnestness is so forceful that it disarms the common run of youthful criticism. The statement that two and two are four, uttered in Hitler's "vibrant barytone," might be clothed in the passionate conviction and noble splendor of some message from the stars. Says the British correspondent:

The realm of illusion, always half real to him, becomes intensely real to him and to his German hearers (who are attuned



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almost mediumistically to his nature) the moment he begins to speak. The opening of his mouth is like the raising of the curtain that instantaneously produces a stage illusion.

He will stand on the platform and declare with booming, cathedral solemnity that when the sun rises the darkness disappears. And his audience will go mad with enthusiasm.

NEITHER Hitler nor his followers can be understood, according to Ellen Wilkinson in the *London Star*, without knowing the German slang word "*spiesser*," of which we are told:

It can't be translated by the mind, but only with the eyes. The word means more than our "suburban" or the French "*petit bourgeois*," or the American "small-town mind." A German "*spiesser*" may be all that, but he has a creed—and a grievance. He is the small business man, or salaried employee, or lower civil servant, who has done his duty—taken a wife, raised children, fought a war when he was told, obeyed the parson, and implicitly believed that God was on his side.



(Image added)

Now he feels that he has been let down. The war was lost. Inflation took his savings, he is penniless, often jobless or existing on a ludicrous salary. But be a workman, or be thought working-class? No, by all his stars he will not.

What the "*spiesser*" wants is to get back into the old German habit of having some one to obey and some one to boss.

Hitler's hold on middle-class Germany is that he is a "*spiesser*" to his marrow. He wanted to be a professional man and had to become a workman. He knows just how the "*spiesser*" feels. He shares his grievances and his shoddy ideals, as foreign to the aristocratic von Papen as to the Socialist Dr. Breitscheid.

To the bewildered, indignant "*spiesser*" Hitler is a sort of super-nurse, some one who can make dreams come true.

AND now the golden time has come. Germany's Mussolini is in the saddle for the time being, and there seems to be little doubt that the coming election will give him a still firmer seat. As Frederick T. Birchall relates in a special cable to the *New York Times*:

In the campaign now in progress preparatory to the German election on March 5, it is already obvious that all the trump cards will be in one hand and it will be strange, indeed, if that hand is not the winner.

As Chancellor Hitler controls the government radio, the only one available in Germany, his campaign speech was spread throughout the country Wednesday and at intervals since, for a phonograph record has repeated the speech so none may miss it.

Through his new ally, Dr. Alfred Hugenberg, who is head of the Ufa corporation, the Chancellor has also the friendly cooperation of all German movies. In addition to the National Socialist press he has, through the same alliance, the friendly cooperation of the Nationalist press, which Dr. Hugenberg controls.

Through Dr. Wilhelm Frick, Nazi Minister of Interior in the Reich, and through his own chief lieutenant, Hermann Goering, as Deputy Commissioner for Prussia, he is assured police cooperation.

To-day brought the crowning touch in a Presidential decree headed "For the protection of the German people," certain provisions of which effectively curb any disagreeable inclinations on the part of Centrist, Socialist, and Communist organs toward him as their opponent in this campaign. Not even a foreign newspaper critical of Chancellor Hitler, his party or his program can be circulated in Germany.

The decree already has been the subject of violent protests. It is termed a "gag-law" unsuitable to a free people.

The Nazi journalists hail the new regulations as "at last enabling the Government to proceed against activities destructive to the nation and disintegrating to the State."

AND the country at large—is it reacting peacefully to the elevation of its most

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popular spellbinder to the virtual dictatorship of Germany? Mr. Birchall tells us that there is now almost an "open season" for Communists, adding:

Last night fifteen Nazi storm-troopers swooped down on a west-end beer-house in Berlin where Communists had been known to foregather. They shot and killed the woman proprietor and then demolished the premises. The police made some arrests, yet none expects the perpetrators to be either tried or convicted, altho the Hindenburg anti-terror ordinance is still in effect.

At a Communist meeting in Berlin, according to the Associated Press:

Wilhelm Peick, Communist member of the Reichstag, said he was reliably informed that the Government intends to outlaw the Communist party before the election by declaring its voting-list illegal.

He presented the German picture from the Communist view-point and warned:

"The people will strike. They are crying for bread and work but all they get is pretty phrases and strong-arm measures from the Government."

He challenged Chancellor Hitler to prove his charge that the Communist party has organized "murder groups."

"We have expelled men from the party for failing to preserve order," he said. "We will do all we possibly can to stamp out murder, but we shall protect ourselves."

FROM Duisburg, Germany, comes another A. P. dispatch relating that "in a gun battle between armed mourners on their way to a cemetery, their police escort, and persons concealed in houses, one of the latter was shot dead and eight members of the cortège were seriously wounded by the ambushed assailants." Reading on:

The police version of the affair said that both police and members of the procession returned the gunfire which came from different points along the route.

Various buildings from which the shots came were searched, but police found nobody. A twenty-year-old housepainter, Rudolph Reckweiler, was slain by a police bullet.

Uniformed Nazis had assembled at party headquarters for the burial of a storm-trooper killed February 1 in a fight with Communists. The procession proceeded along a railway track toward the cemetery when it was first fired upon from an abandoned factory.

That the forthcoming elections will prove the last ever held was asserted by Herr Kerri, a Nazi leader, in a speech at Muenster according to Karl H. Von Wiegand in a Berlin cable to the New York *American*. Herr Kerri is quoted further:

"All the power is now in Hitler's hands, and nothing in the world can tear it from him."

The "Steel Helmets," veterans' organization supporting Hitler (the dispatch runs on) adopted a resolution demanding the death penalty for "traitors, like pacifists," and the expulsion of foreigners "fighting the German nation and culture."

AND the same correspondent in a later dispatch adds these developments:

The Reichstag Committee for safeguarding the freedom of elections tumultu-

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ously adjourned indefinitely after Nazi members refused to allow Paul Loebe, Socialist chairman, to preside. They charged Loebe in the last election campaign called Hitler "a Slovakian with blood dripping from his hands."

The Socialists protested, whereupon Hans Frank, Nazi member, delivered a tirade against the Jews.

At the same time a gigantic protest meeting of 50,000 Communists and Socialists foreshadowed a united "Red and Pink" front against Hitler at the polls, March 5.

Through diplomatic channel came a warning from high places in London that Hitler's objective of a Nationalist Germany, with its campaign of "verboten," its suppression of the opposition, is inviting complete alienation of the friendly German sentiment in Britain and running the danger of throwing England back into the arms of France.

THE Anti-Semitism of the Hitler movement is discusst in a Berlin dispatch written for the Associated Press by Prof. Georg Bernhard, former editor-in-chief of the *Vossische Zeitung* of Berlin, past president of the International Federation of Journalists, and former Democratic member of the Reichstag. We abbreviate:

Militant Anti-Semitism of to-day is a peculiarly German product.

After the World War the National Socialist party set the movement ablaze. According to the party's anti-Semitic gospel, there is no cause for Germany's distress and for the world's misery that can not be traced to Jews.

An astonished world asks: How is such a thing possible in a country where Jews are so prominent in German achievements, as is borne out by the relatively high proportion of German-Jewish born winners of Nobel prizes?

German Jewry represents barely 1 per cent. of the German population. Most of them are town dwellers.

Boycotting of Jewish merchants, aversion to the employment of Jewish workmen and clerks, a ruthless hatred of Jewish artisans, is added to a systematic displacement, especially in small provincial towns of Jewish doctors and lawyers.

But much more than all material discomfort are the spiritual sufferings of the German Jews. It is intolerable for those of Jewish descent and faith, those whose forebears have for centuries dwelt in Germany, and of whom 12,000 gave their lives during the World War, to feel that in a thousand meetings, in a million newspapers, they are classed as inferior people, who have no right to participate in the public life of the country.