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## THE RISE OF HITLERISM

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“As Christ in his twelve disciples raised a stock faithful unto martyrdom, whose belief shattered the great Roman Empire, so in Germany to-day, we are experiencing the same thing. Adolf Hitler is the true Holy Ghost.”—Hans Kerrl.

Whether Hitlerism collapses within the next few months or whether it contributes something permanent to European life, there can be no doubt that it is the most significant move in Germany since the war. A great revolution has been wrought and has shown the fallibility of certain bases of the German structure hitherto deemed infallible. During March of this year, Adolf Hitler—former corporal in the List Regiment of the Royal Bavarian infantry, an unemployed Austrian architect—brought about changes far beyond the dreams of Bismarck or William II., and it behoves us to enquire into the nature of a movement or a state of mind that can produce such results.

Last June, the Weimar Constitution, for long the ideal of theorists and the bane of administrators, proved itself unable any longer to serve as the basis of public life in Germany. It had always meant a divorce between power and politics; now, it led to a Reichstag out of touch with actual affairs and incapable of nominating a ministry commanding a majority of votes. With the resultant discrediting of parliamentary institutions went a discrediting of those moderate parties—the Centre and the Radical Socialists—who pinned their faith to such institutions. This feeling soon linked itself on to the general pessimism in post-War Germany—a psychological malaise bred of

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defeat and harsh treaty-arrangements, suckled in the philosophy of Oswald Spengler and his *Untergang*, matured in the inflation-collapse, strengthened by the false hopes aroused in the revivalist movement of 1925-6, and given final form by the international weakness of Germany.

Such a feeling proved an apt breeding-ground for movements attacking the State, especially when the world economic crisis resulted in six million unemployed and a turn to Communism. To end the drift, Colonel Franz von Papen, representing the pre-War tradition of impersonal public service as carried on in the reactionary Herren Club, formed a Presidial Cabinet on May 31, 1932, and, seven weeks later, displaced the legally elected Socialist government of Prussia and thus placed two-thirds of Germany under a Reich Commissioner. In this way, he evolved both the aims and the methods of the subsequent revolution of March, 1933. Von Papen continued to govern by utilising Section 48 of the Constitution, an emergency-provision enabling the President to issue overriding edicts should the needs of public order and safety demand them. But he and "his six men" were distinctly unpopular and made a tactical blunder in refusing to compete with the emotional showmanship of Hitler—an omission that led to a striking failure in the elections of July 31 and November 6 and to the replacement of von Papen by his henchman, General Kurt von Schleicher, on December 3. The new Chancellor—"his Field-grey Eminence"—was an administrative soldier and a master of intrigue, but fell on January 28, 1933, because, though depending on the small group of conservatives who advised the aged President, he made unwise efforts to live up to his sobriquet of "the Social General." Some of his decrees harmed the interests of the Junker-landholders of east Prussia and he was compelled to resign.

Thus, by the merest fluke of a political intrigue round the person of Hindenburg, the way was opened for Hitlerism. What the Nazis could not gain for themselves was served to them on a platter by the folly of the reactionaries.

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At this moment, Hitlerism was facing disintegration. Hitler had made his great bid for political power in the July elections, but had been unable to increase the number of votes he had obtained in the Presidential elections of the previous March and April. He hoped to take advantage of the Presidential Cabinet's unpopularity in the election of November but instead lost 35 seats and two million votes. For the next six weeks, he drifted in the deepening "twilight of Hitlerism."

To understand this position, we have to analyse the nature of the National Socialist movement. After the war, as a young man of thirty, Hitler had joined the smallest of the many political parties of Germany and had revealed himself a striking public speaker, with an undoubted hypnotic appeal to his audience. In 1919, he was number 7 in a party of seven members, but, within six years, he had 27,000 followers and, in ten years, 178,000. To accomplish this, he talked and ranted in the most emotional fashion, appealed to the lowest feelings of racial and religious bias, and established a dictatorship amongst the disillusioned of all classes. He rose on the scum of the universal discontent and gathered the most incongruous elements together in his Nazi movement. He exploited men's weaknesses and perhaps the adversary who termed him "the most logical practitioner of human insanity" came the nearest to an explanation of his methods. He had no programme. At each of his tumultuous meetings he cried, "Discussion of our programme is useless, my friends; each of you already knows in his heart just what we shall do when we get into power." Offering opportunity to all and greatness to his adopted country, he insisted only on the pledge that his supporters should "take up the fight against the destroyers of our German Fatherland," and dinned into their ears that they were "the greatest people on earth, the finest representatives of that Aryan race that God Almighty intended should rule the earth." He proceeded from hate to hate and, working his audiences into a state of un-

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balanced fury, inveighed against the Treaty of Versailles, most foreigners, all Jews, all Communists, and many Southerners.

His greatest strength lay with the embittered ex-soldiers and with those youth who, down to the age of twenty, had been enfranchised by the Weimar constitution and whose malnutrition in the war-years of their infancy was now expressing itself in an almost insane lack of political balance. The doctor who declared that the war-blockade of Germany was the cause of Hitlerism came very near the truth! These soldiers and boys came together in a part-military, part-mystical fervour and organised the private force known as the Brown Army, now estimated at 600,000 men. In this organisation, the S.A. (**Sturm-Abteilung**) were the crux, their sub-groups, groups, storms, storm-bands, and standards forming a hierarchy that covered every military district in Germany and soon rivalled the similarly organised Stahlhelms of the Nationalists and the Reichsbanner of the Catholic Centre. All manner of men found themselves wearing the brown shirt and the swastika-armband—the ex-service men, the romantic and disillusioned boys, idealists who longed for the regeneration of Germany, the dreamers and the militarists, many workers and unemployed, and especially all who were exasperated by the failure of Parliamentarism, all who thought that Germany was in the mire, and all who feared the rising tide of Communism. It was the vote of these last three sections that swelled Hitler's numbers, although many who voted for him were not so much his adherents as the opponents of his opponents. His was a movement in which many disparate elements were temporarily linked and given cohesion by the emotional fervour of a minority: it remained to be seen whether he could permanently weld them together.

The strength of his "army of the disillusioned" had first been shown in the 1930 elections for the Fifth Reichstag; and indeed, that Reichstag, opening with the entrance

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of 117 noisy Hitlerites in uniform and closing with police-charges in the Tiergarten, was an epitome of conditions in the new Germany. Aided by propaganda on a scale hitherto considered grotesque, Hitler moved from strength to strength, until his party included a million active members at the beginning of 1932. The elections of that year, while outwardly a testimony to his strength, were in reality a check, and it was evident that he had to advance beyond the stage of urging the people to rely on vague aspirations. Hitherto, he had been content to invoke his destiny, create a legend, and invite or bully the people to place themselves in his hands. Emotional rodomontade had been his prime appeal, and, where this had not succeeded, the terrorism of Nazi bands had already been in evidence.

But this was not enough, and, towards the end of 1932, when the parliamentary rise of Hitlerism seemed to be checked, divided counsels arose within the party and the sections of Gregor Strasser and Captain Hermann Goering became openly antagonistic. Strasser, the National Organisation Manager of the party, was a former Bavarian chemist who had developed one of the keenest political minds in Germany, and now wanted a moderate programme of peaceful evolution. Goering, ex-commander of the Richthofen air-squadron, was essentially an attacker and stood for a spectacular and, if need be, brutal dictatorship. After much wavering, Hitler "holidayed" Strasser and his moderate supporters and tied himself to the Juggernaut propelled by Goering, Goebbels, Frick, and Frank. The internecine struggle, however, had adversely affected the party in many ways and, in particular, the triumph of the extremists had alarmed the manufacturers who had hitherto been one of the mainstays of the Nazi's funds. Threatened by bankruptcy, they were reduced to collecting on the streets of every town in Germany, their boxes rattling side by side with those of the Communists. At no time since Bruning disbanded the Brown Army in May, 1932, was their fortune so depressed, and experts were agreed that the rift opened in the January squabbles would ultimately engulf

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the Nazi party—it was passing through the twilight preparatory to the blackness of night.

This was the position when his opponents sacrificed von Schleicher on January 28 and when, for lack of an alternative, Hitler was made Chancellor, but so shackled by the occupation of key-posts by his unwanted Nationalist allies that he was really a "Chancellor in Chains." February saw the development of an absolutely unparalleled movement of propaganda, in which press-censorship, government control of all broadcasting, suspension of constitutional rights, and outright terrorism all played important parts. Nationalists and Nazis were alike agreed on the necessity of such a campaign but, despite the silencing of their opponents and every known method of pressure and force, the Hitlerites could command only  $17\frac{1}{2}$  million and the Nationalists  $3\frac{1}{3}$  million votes out of a total of 40 millions in the elections of March 5—or 288 and 52 seats respectively in a total of 647. Hitler had already intimated that he would continue in power whatever the results of the poll, so that, in reality, now that the Nationalists were not needed so much, Germany was in the hands of an organised minority, never more than 42 per cent. of the people and depending on a few hundred thousand Storm-troops in the Brown Army.

Yet their achievements, however questionable from a constitutional point of view, form an amazing chapter in the history of modern Europe. The lesson inaugurated by von Papen in Prussia was now quickly taught to all of Germany. The rights of established governments counted no more than the warnings of history, and, before March had run its course, the **Deutsches Reich**, with its seventeen component **Länder** (States), found itself metamorphosed. Prussia, with its 38 million people, was under a Reich Commissioner who had ousted the normal government of Herr Braun and had purged all the civil services of undesirables, resulting, in particular, in the control by Captain Goering of the Prussian police. With the **Reichswehr** immobile and

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beyond the scope of internal politics, the power that combined the Prussian police (always organised on a military basis) and the Brown Army could know no rival in Germany.

In the other States, the position varied. The Nazis had a sufficient majority only in five unimportant States (Thuringia, Oldenburg, Lippe, Anhalt, and Mecklenburg-Schwerin), the total population of which was no more than three million. In two (Brunswick and Mecklenburg-Strelitz), the Reich arrangement was duplicated, and Nazis and Nationalists governed in a coalition. But, as these seven States together comprised less than four million people, the Nazis had to face a great belt of territory organised on lines adverse to their interests. It was their method of overcoming the nine remaining recalcitrant States that constituted the touch of mystery in the Nazi-revolution—so much so that the real Revolution may be dated from March 9, when Captain Roehm, Hitler's chief of staff, arranged for the replacement of Held's legal government in Bavaria by a Reich Commissionership, in the hands of General von Epp, an old Bavarian Guardsman and one of the first Nazis. This **coup**—so opposed to the entire tenor of German history—was imposed on the leading Southern State without encountering resistance, and hereafter Germany consisted, not of seventeen co-operating **Lander** under a **Reich**, but of one unified **Reichsland**. The two-thirds majority required by the constitution could never have been obtained for such a change; it was brought about overnight by an edict springing from the Emergency Powers conferred on the Chancellor by a Presidential decree of February 28. The remaining States were all placed under similar Commissioners who, without entirely abolishing the existing governments, reduced them to complete obedience. Thus, Saxony, Wurttemberg, Baden and Hesse in the south, and the four small States of Bremen, Hamburg, Lubeck, and Schaumberg-Lippe in the north, were occupied, and the unification of Germany (as promulgated by von Papen in the preceding year) was complete. The intricate federalism of



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the Weimar constitution had gone, and henceforth the Reich was supreme. The change of flags merely announced the **fait accompli**, although one wonders if the golden banner of Bavaria (and all that it represents) may be so summarily disposed of.

It is interesting to note that one of Hitler's arguments was that the changed position brought about by the March elections should at once be met by an alteration of the State governments in conformity with the changed vote and utterly regardless of the State-elections formerly held. Another argument was that the figures in the States most friendly disposed towards the Nazis should be taken as the normal vote, for deviations from this norm were due only to the inroads of the Communists and other anti-social forces. Finally, it was asserted that the great sweep-over of Prussia in the municipal elections (after the Reich and State vote of March 5) represented the new feeling of the German people and should be extended to the municipalities of all parts of Germany, on the assumption that elections there would lead to the same result. Such arguments as these best show the present state of constitutionalism in Germany.

The new few weeks revealed a despotism fascinating in its completeness. No sign of dictatorship was wanting—rival forces like the Red Front and the Reichsbanner were declared illegal: Communists, even elected deputies, were imprisoned: when the gaols were filled, opponents of the governments were sent to concentration-camps; newspapers were suspended (even the august **Berliner Tageblatt** came under the ban) or compelled to print Nazi propaganda (resulting in the strangest transformations): the Reichstag was purged of the parties of the Left and practically ignored after it had passed a bill abnegating most of its rights to the Chancellor: capitalists were controlled: trades-unions were put down and informed that they must come under a State-organisation; land-laws were changed in order to favour a peasant-proprietary and break up the **Junker-**

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estates: and the educational system was given a crude Nazi-basis. The treatment of Jews, free workers, and independent University-professors was so harsh as to arouse world-wide indignation, and combined with certain patriotic manifestations to create an opinion abroad distinctly unfavourable to the Hitlerites.

The position in this last respect should be carefully surveyed, for it is here that Hitlerism may meet its final test. Those foreigners who believed that Hitler would be chastened by office and hesitated to hold against him the many bombastic utterances that had been necessary in his organising days were far outnumbered by the others who saw in his virulent nationalism a menace to world-peace. They viewed his many attacks on the Treaty of Versailles, on the Polish Corridor, on the isolation of Austria, and on the military preparedness of France as deliberate statements of policy, and not as the heated and oratorical outpourings of the moment. They remembered his famous electoral speech while flying over the Corridor, the threats to smash the Treaty-restrictions, the repeated insistence on conscription for labour and military purposes, the frontier-incidents on the Rhine, the provocative references to the Austrian *Anschluss*—and wondered if Germany had not set the clock back to 1914.

One of the main reasons for Hitler's success had been the German desire to make the *Dritte Reich* "a power in the sun again"—to rally to the cry, "*Deutschland, Erwache!*" "Better three million dead than the continued impotence of the Fatherland," it was said, and Hitler's lieutenants referred publicly to the spirit of Potsdam as regenerative and to the spirit of Locarno as decadent. The pageantry represented by Ludendorff's Death's-Head Hussars uniform seized upon the German mind, and the country plunged deep into an orgy of processions and military displays until grave warnings were sounded abroad that Germany had lost in two months the hard-earned diplomatic gains of the previous 200 months. M. Daladier,

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speaking as Premier of France, pointedly justified his country's realist foreign policy in recent years and declared that the eastern frontier-scheme of fortifications was so near completion as to be impregnable; and his ally, Poland, pointed to the overwhelming superiority and efficiency of her forces.

Hitler's answer was to attempt to limit his bolder statements to home-consumption and, while allowing them to stand within Germany, to deny them through the agency of the foreign press-correspondents. He also disavowed various demonstrations and incidents as the work of irresponsible sections of his followers, acting without orders. But neither of these pretexts sufficed, and the pressure of the Nationalist Foreign Minister, Baron von Neurath, a trained diplomat who had previously been at the Court of St. James, constrained him to a more moderate policy. This delicate balance of forces is very evident in Germany's reactions in recent months to the Disarmament Conference, first carrying opposition almost to the point of wrecking the Conference and repeatedly announcing in home-papers her intention to rearm, and, at the last moment (when confronted by the opposition of practically every other European State, even of an Italy alarmed by the *Anschluss* movement!), accepting the British Plan as a basis. Similarly she has just signed the four-Power Pact, abandoning warlike settlement of disputes for ten years.

This does not, of course, affect the German claim for a revision of the Treaty and it is, indeed, inconceivable that any German should give up this claim. The Nazis are resolved to secure a rectification of Germany's frontiers and a restoration of some of her colonies, and still make the reunion of the ninety million Teutons in Europe one of their main objectives. The only recent change is that the antagonistic grouping of public opinion abroad has made them realise that these objectives are jeopardised by Nazi activity in other directions, and that even those foreigners

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who believed in the justice of Germany's contentions regarding the Treaty would not feel inclined to make concessions to such a government as that of Hitler.

Hitler, in short, finds himself in a quandary. Terrorism cannot permanently keep him in office in Germany, and he has almost exhausted the campaigns of hate he has conducted against his various opponents. He raised his party on the hatred of all who wished to keep Germany down: he won his place at the elections by a hatred of Communism: he gave the further sop of a hatred of Semitism: and throughout, his underlings played the note of hatred to the peace-makers. But, unless he gains time by directly attacking the Centre and thus provoking the South beyond endurance, or unless he takes a more direct stand in the old fight between industrialists and agriculturalists, he must solve this question of foreign policy. He has promised his adherents a regeneration of Germany abroad, and their present fervour demands an intransigent policy; yet this means instant diplomatic isolation, and, in world-councils, Hitler, willingly or perforce, has found himself forced into "the Locarno-path" on which he has so often opened the vials of his oratorical wrath. It is a delicate situation, and perhaps the ultimate irony of Hitlerism is in the combination of a Goering-Goebbels policy at home and a mediatory policy abroad.

The dilemma is beyond solution and leads to the inevitable conclusion that either Hitlerism must change its nature by accepting the above compromise or must disturb the peace of Europe. The probable outcome is that Hitler—a figure doubtfully balancing the jarring elements in a movement grown beyond his comprehension—will be forced into the policy of moderation at home as he has been abroad. In other words, his movement will be ultimately represented by the Strassers and the Feders rather than those necessary elements of a forceful transition, the Goerings and the Goebbels. The only alternatives are its disruption,

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which spells more suffering for Germany, or its success in its more hectic form, which means the triumph of pre-1914 ideas and the resultant disturbance of Europe's peace. That is why the internal events of the next few months in Germany will so directly affect the rest of the world, for weal or for woe.

S. H. ROBERTS.