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UNDER THE SWASTIKA

1933-1945

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inside



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Berliners enthusiastically salute the Olympic Torch as it is carried through the German capital in the summer of 1936.

Prologue

The rows of uniformed men carrying flaming torches from the Tiergarten towards the Brandenburg Gate seem to be unending. They parade through the three most southerly of the five arches with their decorated columns and then march onwards around the small roadworks in front of the main archway. Watched by countless spectators the torch bearers continue across Pariser Platz and turn south at the first cross-roads into Wilhelmstrasse, the street lined with government buildings. They march past the numerous German State ministries until they finally reach the Reich Chancellery opposite Wilhelmsplatz. (Reich = area under German rule. It literally means “realm” or “empire”, but this is misleading because the monarchy no longer existed as the Kaiser [“Emperor”] had abdicated.) There, at the window of his office on the first floor, stands the newly elected Reich Chancellor of Germany: Adolf Hitler, leader of the National Socialist Party of German Workers (NSDAP) which has just won the majority of seats Reichstag (the German parliament). The “Führer” (= leader, head of State) salutes the thousands of men who are marching through the cold winter in his honour. It is many decades since the old victory arch of the Hohen-

zollern dynasty and the surrounding streets full of government buildings have witnessed such a triumphant procession as this on Monday evening 30th January 1933.

Even Hitler is overwhelmed by the enthusiasm which greets him. He asks his photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann: “Where has Goebbels managed to get hold of so many torches in such a short space of time?” Indeed the NSDAP Gauleiter of Berlin, experienced as he is in masterminding impressive backdrops for his “Führer”, has surpassed even himself on this afternoon. It was not until just before 5 p.m. that the new Minister for the Interior, National Socialist Wilhelm Frick, lifted the ban that had existed on holding demonstrations at the Brandenburg Gate. Just two hours later all the members of the SA, the NSDAP and other Hitler sympathisers who heard Goebbels’ rallying call, gather at the Kleiner Stern in the Tiergarten, the junction of Bellevueallee and Charlottenburger Chaussee. Torches are handed out, marching and brass bands set up the beat and soon tens of thousands of boots are hitting the asphalt in perfect time. At about 8.30 p.m. the front of the procession reaches its destination, the Reich Chancellery. The whole march past takes over three hours and the



The first re-enactment of the torchlight procession for the film “SA-Mann Brand”.



Even the most well-known picture of the march through the Brandenburg Gate was not taken at the time but staged at a later date.

jubilant Berliners on Wilhelmplatz brave the freezing temperatures until gone midnight.

Goebbels, who on this evening makes his first radio broadcast ever, goes into raptures: “It is so moving for me to see how, in this city where we began six years ago with only a handful of people, the whole population is rising up and how they are all marching past; workers, citizens, farmers, students and soldiers – a great national community.” On the same night he writes in his diary: “Endless. A million people on the move. The old man (Reich President Paul von Hindenburg) takes the salute. In the next building is Hitler. It is a new era! A spontaneous explosion of the people. Indescribable. More and more crowds.” The British Ambassador, who also sees the marching columns from his Embassy in Wilhelmstrasse, gives a more truthful account of the events. Sir Horace Rumbold reports back to the Foreign Minister in London: “The Nazi press maintain that about half a million people took part in the torch procession, evidently without knowing that to complete such a parade it would

have taken one hour for 10,000 men marching in lines of six and that for four hours 50,000 is the maximum number possible.”

Quite apart from the question of numbers the few original photos of the torch procession are disappointing – underexposed and out of focus or blurred. There are no moving pictures at all. So, in the weeks that follow, the resourceful and unscrupulous Goebbels stages the torchlight procession twice more for the lenses of picture journalists and cameramen: once for the propaganda film “SA man Brand” and then, on an even larger scale, for the production of “Hans Westmar”, also a feature film about the victory of National Socialism in Germany. Most of the photographs and all the film shots depicting the torchlight procession through the Brandenburg Gate come from these two staged versions of the parade. Right from the very start the new regime is based on lies and deception.

Democratically minded Berliners do not celebrate on 30th January 1933; the good feeling they had enjoyed on the occasion of the traditional Press Ball two days earlier has evaporated. The pacifist and Hitler



The torchlight procession on 30th January. This photo is authentic; there is a small roadworks which the procession has to march round.

opponent, Harry Graf Kessler writes with horror in his diary: "Today Berlin is in carnival mood. SA and SS troops and other steel helmets in uniform fill the streets, spectators cram the pavements. (...) The whole of Wilhelmsplatz is teeming with gaping crowds." Theodor Eschenburg, an employee of a large business concern, hears the radio coverage of the torchlight procession at an evening function in the exclusive home of one of his company directors. As they listen, the assembled company, all of a conservative persuasion, become increasingly dumbstruck. The 28 year old Eschenburg interrupts the silence with the question, "When will we be rid of Hitler again?" Max Liebermann, the Berlin artist, who lives in a building right next to the Bran-

denburg gate, expresses his feelings on this evening very succinctly: "It makes me want to vomit – but I couldn't stuff enough food down my throat." The darkest epoch in the history of the German capital begins with the torchlight procession through the Brandenburg Gate on 30th January 1933. This evening unleashes the indescribable violence which starts in Germany, spreads through Europe and eventually has consequences for the whole world. Millions upon millions of people lose their lives because of National Socialism and Hitler's war destroys so many cultural and economic values. Six decades later, the traces of twelve years of Nazi dictatorship from 1933 until 1945 are still evident – even if the divisions in Berlin, Germany and Europe have been overcome.

The Path to Power

On foreign soil

Adolf Hitler had his first experience of politics in Upper Bavaria, especially in the beer cellars of Munich and this was where his speeches, with their mixture of anti-Semitism and nationalist prejudice, were best received. In Berlin, by contrast, the National Socialists, founded in 1919 as the “German Workers’ Party”, enjoyed very little popularity and at first attracted no more than a few hundred supporters. Neither was there any enthusiasm for the exaggeratedly hate-ridden and hectoring speeches of the Nazi leader.

For Hitler Berlin was always a target in both senses of the word; both as an object of hatred and of desire, at the same time a measure of what he despised and yet his own personal “Promised Land”. Since his four brief visits to Berlin as a soldier after the First World War, Hitler’s relationship with the capital had been characterised by deep division. On the one hand his world view included the rejection of modern city life but on the other hand he was fascinated by the workings of a metropolis and by Berlin in particular. This contradiction is revealed in Hitler’s “Mein Kampf”, a confused book written in 1924-25 which is

mainly a montage of stereotypes. At one point in the book the leader of the National Socialists attacks the city as a “merely a collection of blocks of flats and nothing more. It is difficult to see how a special attachment is to develop with such a meaningless place.” Yet only a hundred pages on he writes: “The geopolitical significance of such a centrally situated city cannot be underestimated. A political movement can only gain long-term power by being part of the aura of a place suffused with the magical charm of a Mecca or Rome, and has as its substance an inner unity and pays homage to the summit of this unity.” Despite all his criticism of modern cities Hitler had realised very early on that winning the political battle for Berlin would be decisive in the acquisition of power in and over Germany and for this reason, from 1920 onwards, he kept returning to the capital, sometimes for weeks at a time.

Some of his most important financial supporters lived here. His party was always hard up and constantly needed funds, not only because their leader was unemployed but also because they were producing a newspaper, the *Völkische Beobachter* (People’s Observer), which ran at a loss. Hitler’s first base in Berlin was the city home of the



A demonstration by a small group of Hitler supporters in November 1925 in the Lustgarten. In the background are the Berlin City Palace on the left and the City Command Headquarters on the right.

piano manufacturer Edwin Bechstein who lived near Museumsinsel (Museum Island). In these early years Bechstein's wife Helene was one of the NSDAP's most generous donors. She enjoyed entertaining Hitler and his "national" friends and sometimes even pawned jewellery or paintings to help out the charismatic bohemian from Munich. The Bechsteins' house at number six Johannisstrasse in central Berlin, which Hitler's confidant from those days Ernst Hanfstaengel jealously and condescendingly called "one of the grandest boxes in the inner city", was destroyed in the "Battle for Berlin" at the end of April 1945.

It was another sponsor who organised Hitler's first political appearance in Berlin.

The former Director of Siemens, Emil Gansser, invited his protégé to the elegant "National Club", where he was to address the "inner circle" of senior officers, officials and businessmen and Hitler made his first speech there at the end of May 1922. The "National Club" was situated directly opposite the eastern entrance of the Reichstag; on this site today stands the Jakob-Kaiser-Haus, a parliamentary office building. Hitler's words evidently attracted interest as he was asked back for a repeat performance on 5 June 1922, but they failed to have any political effect and in spite of the (short-lived) support from the Berlin industrial baron Ernst von Borsig not enough money was raised to fund the NSDAP in Berlin.



The SA march through Berlin in 1930 under the protection of the police.

However, a few months later a Berlin group of the Munich splinter party emerged under the name of “Grossdeutsche Arbeiterpartei” (Workers’ Party of Greater Germany), but they were unable to increase their membership to much more than their original 194 founder members, mainly because the democratically inclined Prussian Police rigorously and cleverly prevented any attempts by the right-wing extremists to get round the Prussia wide ban on the NSDAP which came into force on 15 November 1922. Throughout 1923 the Nazis remained insignificant in the capital. When Hitler called for a “march on Berlin” after the Munich Putsch on 8 November, there was only a small band of about 40 faithful followers who were ready to support the “coup d’état” – not a very impressive fighting force to conquer a city of millions.

Thanks to sympathetic judges in Bavaria, Hitler only had to serve one fifth of his already short sentence for high treason. By the end of 1924 he was free again and his first long journey took him back to Berlin. The German capital was clearly his most important destination outside Munich – as it had been between 1920 and 1923. In mid-March 1925, only two weeks after the lifting of the ban and the subsequent founding of a nationwide NSDAP, he met up with other politicians from the extreme right. This particular visit to Berlin is noteworthy because the talks were held in the Reichstag building in which, according to the accounts written by his own party, the Nazi “Führer” claimed never to have set foot before 1933. The insignificance of the NSDAP at this time can be demonstrated by the results of the first ballot in the Reich

Presidential election on 29 March 1925 when World War I General Erich Ludendorff, the candidate supported among others by Hitler, gained just 1.1% of the votes overall and as little as 0.4% in Berlin. Even more shattering was the result of the first election in which Hitler's Party took part; in 1925 in the local elections in Berlin the NSDAP polled 137 votes in Spandau, the only borough where they had a candidate. The official records list this as last place.

"Battle for Berlin"

Hitler wanted to change all this, but he still lacked both real support and the means to mobilise new party members. There had been a local Berlin NSDAP since February 1925 but initially they only attracted attention because of mismanagement and internal strife. In the first 18 months the Berlin NSDAP had to move offices several times, apparently because they could not pay even modest rents. From 1st August 1926 onwards the Party "resided" in some damp, dilapidated rooms on the ground floor of a building in the back courtyard of 109, Potsdamer Strasse between Pohl- and Lützowstrasse. The original building, which the several hundred Party members used to derisively call (among other things) the "Opium Den", has been destroyed and replaced with a new construction. Although the Berlin NSDAP was still small it quickly divided into two opposing wings. On one side were the "nationally" minded, older members with a middle-class background who had originally founded the local party and opposing them was the party activist Kurt Daluge, a qualified engineer who had control of about 600 supporters. These men



Berlin's NSDAP Gauleiter (District Leader) Joseph Goebbels giving one of his typical speeches from an open car.

were almost without exception former soldiers from the front and fighters from the notorious right extremist Freikorps, who had been deeply disappointed by Germany's defeat in World War I. By 1924 they had already started violent attacks on liberal, left-wing and allegedly "Jewish-looking" Berliners, mainly in the elegant districts near the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. In 1926, Daluge, who had joined the Hitler movement back in 1923, took his men with him into the Berlin SA, the NSDAP band of thugs organised on paramilitary lines. Then in the summer he challenged the middle-class party members with this power base behind him. This struggle culminated in a mass punch-up between the supporters of both wings of the party in a public house called "Haverlands Festsäle" near the Hackescher Markt S-Bahn station.

Hitler had been watching the events in Berlin from Munich without taking any action, but now he got involved; he despatched his best young agitator, 29 year old Joseph Goebbels, to the capital as "Gauleiter" (District Party Chairman). Goebbels arrived in Berlin on 9th November 1926, exactly three years after the "Führer's" failed Putsch in Munich. In the 19 years that followed, Goebbels controlled the Berlin NSDAP and his ruthlessness in the battle for Berlin made him one of Germany's major politicians. His diary entry on the evening of 8th November had read: "Into the fray!" and it was not long before the Gauleiter put words into action. His first clever tactical move was to make Daluege his deputy and thereby have the Berlin SA on his side; and he knew exactly what he wanted of them – brutality and effective publicity. After only five days in Berlin, Goebbels had 300 SA men march through the communist stronghold of Neukölln in order to provoke savage fighting. A series of similar operations followed, attracting wide-spread attention to the NSDAP which until now had been hardly mentioned or simply referred to as some sort of curiosity in the Berlin press. The first large brawls with the KPD (German Communist Party) in the boroughs of Spandau and "red" Wedding resulted in dozens of casualties on both sides, some of them with severe injuries.

This didn't worry Goebbels. On the contrary, he was pleased and continued with his tactics. On 20th March 1927 the violent punch-ups escalated further: In a train from Trebbin (Brandenburg) to Berlin there was serious fighting between two dozen men of the Communist "Rotfront-

kämpfer-Bund" and the numerically stronger SA, who happened to be sitting in the next carriage. Reinhold Muchow, a low-ranking NS official in Berlin described in a private report how the situation developed: "It was obvious to the SA they had to respond to this provocation. (...) At each station we unleashed a stone bombardment on the communist carriage. (...) Then we reached Lichterfeld-Ost station. The SA had to alight here. This was the climax." Here Hitler's men pulled the emergency brake and stormed the compartments of the communists, all of whom sustained serious injuries. Then the revved-up "brown-shirts" marched from the Lichterfeld S-Bahn station to Wittenbergplatz to listen to a speech by their Gauleiter, beating up any supposed "Jewish" Berliners and other opponents on the way. Goebbels complained in his diary the next evening that: "People blamed us." The Berliner Morgenpost, at that time the largest newspaper in Germany, demanded: "The streets should belong to peaceful citizens, not some demonstrators or other." The right-wing liberal Vossische Zeitung was more specific: "The National Socialists started things." A few weeks later the violence led to a ban on the NSDAP, but only inside Berlin itself. In the Weimar Republic, a state under the rule of law, it had not been understood that Hitler, Goebbels and the National Socialist Party would use any means they could to achieve power.

At the beginning this goal was a long way off. Exactly how far can be seen by looking at the NSDAP election results in Berlin; in the Reichstag election in 1928, when the Party was allowed to take part again, they gained just 1.6% of the vote which was significantly less than their aver-



The head of Berlin's SA, Walter Stennes (standing left) and Gauleiter Joseph Goebbels compete for the leadership of the Nazi supporters in the capital. Photo probably originates from April 1928.

age in the rest of the country (2.6%). In the next few years, however, their progress was meteoric. Between 1928 and Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor in 1933, there were a total of 12 elections in Berlin; no fewer than three Reichstag elections, three for the Prussian State Landtag (State Parliament), two local elections and two ballots for the office of German Reich President. With each election the NSDAP share of the vote rose steadily – from the meagre 1.6% in 1928 to a massive 24.6% in the summer of 1932. Compared with the results across the whole nation those in the Reichstag constituency of Berlin (the only one in Germany whose borders were the same as those of the city itself) were always at the lower end, higher only than those in the strongly catholic constituency of Köln-

Aachen. It has often been maintained that Berlin was one of the regions where the National Socialists were least popular, but this is a misleading statement. When the Berlin results are not compared with the numbers in other constituencies (including its own outlying rural areas where the NSDAP support was much stronger) but only with those in other big cities, it is clear that when ranked with the 15 largest cities in Germany, Berlin comes about halfway, as does Munich. In Bremen, Stuttgart, Dortmund, Essen and Duisburg, for example, the NSDAP found less support.

The National Socialist stronghold in the capital was the solidly middle-class borough of Steglitz and similarly well-to-do districts like Schöneberg, Wilmersdorf and Charlottenburg turned out in greater numbers for



In 1932 Adolf Hitler runs for election as Reich President against the current Reich President Paul von Hindenburg. Passers-by in Kreuzberg study the new NSDAP election posters.

the NSDAP. In the working class boroughs of Wedding, Prenzlauer Berg and Friedrichshain, Hitler's Party attracted significantly fewer votes. In the total results for Berlin the other boroughs were either just over or just under the average. At the beginning it was mainly white collar workers and the middle-class who voted for Hitler's Party, both in Berlin and throughout Germany; those people who were particularly frightened of social decline, with male voters slightly in the majority. Between 1930 and 1932 the NSDAP gradually became a "Peoples' Protest Party", capable of winning votes in all strata of

society, even among workers and the unemployed.

It was essentially Joseph Goebbels who was responsible for this. Despite several bans on the Party or SA for excesses of violence, he succeeded in selling the NSDAP to the middle-classes as a means to combat the threat of communism and the universally feared "Bolshevik Revolution". In the process the Gauleiter was just as ruthless with his own people as he was with his enemies and he overcame three Putsch attempts within the Berlin SA. Under their new leader, Walther Stennes, this troop of thugs had enlisted numerous members, but



An SA "Guard of Honour" at Horst Wessel's grave on the day after his burial in the St.Nikolai cemetery in Prenzlauer Berg.

they attached much more importance to the "socialist" messages of the NSDAP manifesto than the Party leadership. Goebbels, by contrast, wanted an outward demonstration of the rise of the NSDAP and by working for a just a few weeks in the "Opium Den" in Potsdamer Strasse, he raised sufficient funds from wealthy NS followers to move into "suitably appropriate" offices in Lützowstrasse in the borough of Tiergarten. The conflict escalated; in 1928 Stennes and many of his allies publicly resigned from Hitler's Party and only allowed themselves to be persuaded to return because of generous concessions. In

1930, Stennes and his loyal SA men stormed the Gauleiter's offices and it was Hitler's personal visit which prevented a split in the Party just before the important elections. Finally, in 1931, when Stennes was supposed to be replaced, he occupied Goebbels' offices again and for two days he took over Goebbels' newspaper, "Der Angriff". At this point the "Führer" expelled the rebellious Berlin SA leader and the Gauleiter managed to regain control of the NS followers.

As the Party membership grew Goebbels now started to increase the size of the headquarters of the "Berlin Gau" at reg-



Anti-Nazi demonstration on 1st May 1932 in the Lustgarten. Three arrows have been sewn on to the captured swastika flag – the symbol of the Social Democrat "Iron Front".

ular intervals, on average every 18 months. First it was moved further west to Wilhelmplatz in Charlottenburg (today Richard-Wagner-Platz) then back towards the city centre in Hedemannstrasse, Kreuzberg and finally, in October 1932, to 11, Vossstrasse, more or less at the back of the Government Headquarters. All these "Gau" offices of the Berlin NSDAP were destroyed in the allied bombing or were demolished when the city was rebuilt.

The rise, the problems and the fall of the Berlin NSDAP can be followed in minute detail in Goebbels' diary, which he kept on an almost daily basis. It has to be said, however, that these diary entries were never subjectively honest reflections but

were from a propagandist perspective right from the beginning. Goebbels had always planned to publish his notes as books and the first one, with the significant title, "The Battle for Berlin. The Beginning 1926/27", appeared in 1932. Nearly every violent act was turned round to sound like a "signal". When his SA troops stormed the premiere of the anti-war film, "All Quiet on the Western Front", about Erich Maria Remarque's novel of the same name and the performance license required in those days was subsequently withdrawn, Goebbels called it a victory for "Nationalist German". Every SA death was depicted as martyrdom – whether it was like Hans-Georg Kitemeyer, who fell into the Landwehr canal in 1928 in a drunken stupor or like the charismatic SA leader, Horst Wessel, who was shot during an argument with his landlady. Goebbels even wanted to stylize Wessel's funeral into a Party "Triumphal Procession", but the police put a stop to this on the grounds that only ten vehicles for the deceased's friends and relatives could be permitted. So instead, Goebbels staged an act of provocation – an SA march past the Communist Headquarters on Bülowplatz (today Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz). The "brown-shirts" were behaving with such brutality that in 1930 Prussia issued a general ban on uniform whereupon Goebbels told his followers to all appear in white shirts.

At this stage, however, there is no way that the NSDAP had "secured" power in and over Germany and least of all on the streets of Berlin. Until January 1933 it wasn't the rise of National Socialism, but rather of Social Democracy and above all Communism which was dominating the city



After the ban on uniforms for the SA in 1930, Goebbels has all his henchmen appear in white shirts.

landscape, although since 1929 there had not been a majority for the Democrats in Berlin. In the local elections the three explicitly anti-constitutional parties of the Weimar Republic, the KPD, the NSDAP and the German National Party (DNVP) (which had veered strongly to the right under their new leader, the press baron Alfred Hugenberg), had gained 48% of the

votes – almost as many as the SPD, the Liberal splinter parties and the Catholic Centre put together (48.7%). In the subsequent Reichstag election in September 1930 their share had increased to 57.7%; democracy had collapsed in the German capital long before Adolf Hitler became Reich Chancellor.

Brutal Triumph

Transfer of power

In the New Year of 1932/33 the NSDAP appeared to have passed its peak, not only in Berlin but all over Germany as well. Their election results had been sinking since 1932. Important Nazi officials were rejecting Hitler's strategy of "all or nothing" (the Reich Chancellorship or total opposition) and were ready to allow the NSDAP to be a junior partner in a "National cabinet" and the Party was living well beyond its financial means.

In the German capital there was an increasing feeling of relief. In its 1933 New Year edition for example, the liberal Berliner Tagesblatt, the most respected newspaper in Germany, mocked Hitler: "All over the world people were talking about - what was his first name - Adalbert Hitler. Some time in the future? Missing, presumed dead!" In assessing the stranglehold that the National Socialists and the Communists had exerted on the State in the past year, the editor of the Vossische Zeitung happily concluded that, "In spite of this, the Republic has been saved - not because it has been defended, but because its attackers have finished each other off."

In fact, Hitler had done little to achieve his aim. In 1932 he had taken part in two exploratory discussions with Reich President Paul von Hindenburg but had twice antagonised the aged but extremely status conscious Field Marshal with his demands. Hindenburg might have appointed the NSDAP "Führer" as "perhaps - Postmaster General" in a coalition government, but not as Reich Chancellor even if his party had formed the strongest faction by a good margin. On top of this, Hitler had internal party problems; his extravagant life-style set the brown-shirts, of whom by now there were several thousands - against him. In Munich Hitler lived in a luxurious nine room apartment and used as an office a whole floor of the "Brown House", a city mansion near Königsplatz, which had been turned into the Party Headquarters. Since 1931 he had been staying regularly in the most expensive hotel in the capital, the "Kaiserhof" on Wilhelmsplatz opposite the Reich Chancellery. Today, the North Korean Embassy stands on the site of this exclusive hotel on the former Wilhelmsplatz (Mohrenstrasse underground station). Of course, Hitler was using the hotel accommodation as a political statement; the NSDAP leader was announcing his claim to a top



A column of SA man in a deliberately provocative procession past the Communist Headquarters on Bülow Platz (now Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz).

position in a future government. He never stayed there alone but always had an entourage of about a dozen people which sometimes took up half a floor of the "Kaiserhof". Hitler practically held court here, received visitors and kept petitioners waiting. In the winter of 1931/32, at the height of the economic crisis, many of Hitler's followers were out of work and his extravagance, partly financed by their membership subscriptions, must have struck them as presumptuous and provoking. In fact in the last weeks of 1932 an unusually high number of SA men went over to the Communists and surprisingly the front between the left-wing and right-wing extremists had generally weakened. At the

beginning of November the KPD and the NSDAP had staged a joint strike at the Berlin Transport Company (BVG), against the wishes of the unions and the SPD. After five days and several deaths the industrial action crumbled and Goebbels noted a very "muted atmosphere" in the Berlin NSDAP, which was doubtless expressing things mildly. In December the Party faced division; a dramatic appearance by Hitler in front of NS officials in the "Kaiserhof", at which the Party leader is even supposed to have threatened suicide, prevented the split.

Despite being pretty shattered, even at the beginning of 1933 the "Führer" still continued to exert considerable influence

over millions of followers and the former Reich Chancellor, Franz von Papen, wanted to exploit this situation. In 1932 von Papen had led the government for six months as the front man of the strongly conservative circles around the Minister for the Army, Kurt von Schleicher. This supposed puppet, a not very gifted but extremely ambitious schemer, had enjoyed his position as Reich Chancellor and wanted to get back into power after his removal from office in November 1932. At the beginning of January Papen began to play a game of high stakes; he promised Hitler the post of Reich Chancellor in charge of a reactionary cabinet in which he would appoint himself as Deputy Reich Chancellor. What he didn't tell the "Führer" was that those who shared his views, mainly members of the anti-democratic DNVP, were intending to "frame" Hitler and his two NSDAP Ministers in the cabinet. In this way Papen was expecting to be able to "enlist" the masses of the Hitler movement for his own reactionary policies. He stalled all criticism of his plan by his allies: "What do you want then! I have Hindenburg's trust. In two months we have forced Hitler into a corner so that he's squealing." At the same time the similarly hard line conservative, but anti-Papen Army Chiefs were vehemently against Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. On 26th January 1933, when Papen was almost watching the closing stages of his game of intrigue, General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord warned the Reich President of the dangers of trusting the leader of the NSDAP with the business of government. Hindenburg is said to have responded with the words: "Gentlemen, surely you don't think that I am capable of appointing that

Austrian Corporal to Reich Chancellor of Germany."

The weekend of 28th/29th January 1933 changed everything. A sensational rumour went round Berlin; the German Army intended to stage a putsch to stop Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor. The Potsdam garrison would march into the government district and keep the Reich President under house arrest. Reich Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher, who had just officially resigned, would dissolve the Reichstag and rule as dictator for one or two years. On the Sunday Papen informed Hindenburg of the rumour and Hitler and Goebbels heard about it in the Gauleiter's elegant apartment on Reichskanzlerplatz (today Theodor-Heuss-Platz) in Charlottenburg. As a "counter-measure" they ordered the mobilisation of the SA and waited until five o'clock in the morning for the alleged coup d'état. But nothing happened – apart from the fact that on this Sunday Hindenburg gave in to pressure from Papen and accepted the cabinet he had assembled, with Hitler at its helm. Schleicher, Hammerstein and the German Army had never intended to stage a putsch; the rumour had simply started through a series of misunderstandings and the ill-fated work of a self-appointed "intermediary" in a highly political Berlin. Nevertheless, on the following morning, 30th January 1933, against his better judgement the Reich President appointed the "Führer" of the NSDAP as leader of the government – not, incidentally, according to protocol at 73, Wilhelmstrasse, in the Reich Presidential residence, which was being renovated at the time, but in the Reich Chancellor's residence at 77, Wilhelmstrasse, where Hindenburg was living



SA block off the Hotel "Kaiserhof" where Hitler is staying. (30th January 1933)



The "Führer" of the NSDAP makes an appearance on the hotel balcony for his supporters (propaganda shot).

during the renovations. On this site today, where on the final night of the Weimar Republic Hindenburg had awaited a military revolution, stand the last prefabricated buildings so typical of those erected in the GDR era.

Hitler's appointment was by no means welcomed by all Berliners. In the *Berliner Morgenpost* on 31st January 1933 their readers were told to be "vigilant and distrusting" and the newspaper promised: "From now on we shall have to examine the actions of the new government to check whether they are in accordance with the constitution to which they have sworn an oath. We shall remain completely calm and objective. We shall not allow ourselves to be provoked and recommend that everyone who finds this change of government unedifying does the same." On the other hand the liberal journalists of the Ullstein press were not expecting that Hitler would not be interested in the usual traditions of democratic politics. In any case the Politbüro of the KPD (The "Politbüro" was the name given to the Communist Party executive

committee) did not stick to the recommendation of not giving a pretext for starting a fight. On the contrary, Ernst Thälmann's aides invited their followers to launch attacks on the NSDAP and the police. During the very first night of Hitler's government the communists shot dead an SA leader and a policeman in a brawl in Charlottenburg. This double shooting was a godsend for the new government; they could now start to quell the apparently immediate threat of a "bolshevik revolution" with brutal violence. In July 1932 Franz von Papen had ruthlessly brought the largely social democratic Prussian police force and administration in line with his reactionary policies and so the new Minister for the Interior, Herman Göring, was able to deploy a compliant instrument against the KPD and the SPD. After the new cabinet had only been in office for 72 hours, it became immediately clear that Hitler would not be satisfied with the extent of his powers; he would not allow himself to be "framed" nor "commit himself" and certainly not be "pushed into the background". With equal speed the



Passers-by look at the burnt-out Reichstag from in front of the Brandenburg Gate.



The gutted debating chamber of the parliament building.

Army Generals learned of Hitler's plans. On 3rd February 1933, in the same rooms of the Bendlerblock in Tiergartenstrasse where eleven and a half years later, on 20th July 1944, Graf Stauffenberg's plot would fail, the new Reich Chancellor informed the military Chiefs of Staff of the "expansion of the "Lebensraum" of the German people, if necessary with weapons." In other words - war.

Total power by conquest

To achieve this aim, however, the "Führer" had to gain complete control over Germany. As early as February 1933 he began his first war – against his enemies at home and the German capital was the most important, if not the only battlefield. The extremely easy transfer of governmental control to Hitler was followed by the brutal conquest of total power by the NSDAP. The KPD and SPD newspapers and even those run by other political parties were immediately banned on grounds of triviality and the SA

roamed the streets of Berlin with increasing violence, hunting down any "communist revolutionaries". On 17th February Goering issued the order: "Police officers who use their guns in the course of their duties will have my full protection, regardless of the consequences of their actions." Put simply: shoot first and ask later. Five days later 50,000 SA and SS men were appointed as "Auxiliary Policeman". The authors of the violence on the streets thus became the instruments of state power. Under these conditions a fair campaign for the new Reichstag elections, which Hitler had immediately called, was out of the question. This was of course intentional; the new Reich Chancellor wanted to turn the vote into a triumphant plebiscite in order to gain total power.

An almost incredible coincidence then came to his aid. On the evening of 21st February, Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch anarchist got into the Reichstag and set it on fire using such primitive materials as fire lighters and torches made out of tablecloths.

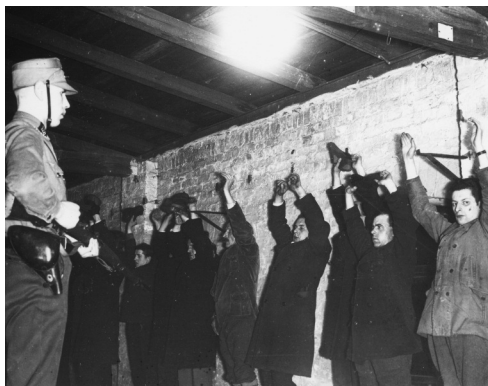


Berlin Police search and occupy the KPD (German Communist Party) Central Office on Bülowplatz on 2nd February 1933.

The fire was enormous and reduced the whole parliamentary chamber to ashes. Two days previously, van der Lubbe, a mentally confused invalid, had already started fires at four other places in Berlin, but they had all been discovered in time. The Reichstag fire was the lunatic's first success and by the time the fire brigade reached the parliament building the fire was out of control and the flames could no longer be extinguished. There has been speculation ever since that Lubbe was only a front man and that in fact a troop of SA men had set the parliament on fire. However, all the "evidence" that has been used for this argument has proved to consist of misinterpretations, rumours or bad forgeries. Hitler, Goebbels and Goering were actually completely surprised by van der Lubbe's arson, but they immediately made use of it for own purposes. In the

same night arrests were made all over Prussia and above all in Berlin, using lists that had been drawn up by the political police as early as the Autumn of 1932 – before Hitler was Reich Chancellor.

The lucky ones among the social democrats, left-wing intellectuals and other Hitler opponents were arrested by the police and taken to the normal detention centres; the unlucky ones fell into the hands of the "Auxiliary Police" of the SA or SS and were locked up in one of several dozen hastily improvised prisons. One of these was the equipment shed of the water tower in Prenzlauer Berg and also numerous SA "assault centres", mostly the back rooms or store rooms of ordinary pubs. In these practically lawless rooms the SA mercilessly beat up and tortured their victims; more than 20 people were murdered in Berlin during the



SS guarding abducted Hitler opponents in one of the many improvised torture cellars.

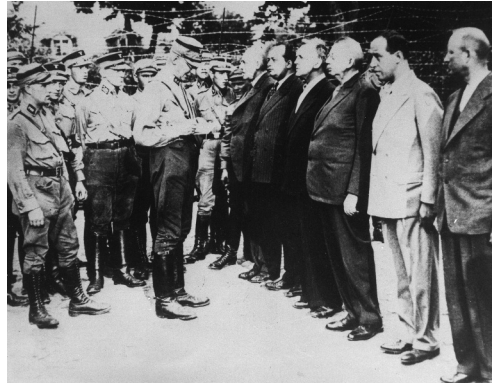
seven days following the Reichstag fire. It is impossible to say exactly how many of these torture chambers (later called “unofficial KZs”) existed in the capital in the early days of March but several thousand NS opponents were interrogated there in the days leading up to the Reichstag elections on 5th March. The state only intervened if the SA suddenly became really savage. On 3rd March 1933, for example, at 20, Wilhelmstrasse, Spandau, the police prevented several prisoners being executed and on 29th March, when a police riot squad even stormed the Berlin SA Headquarters in Hedemannstrasse, Kreuzberg, and freed the men held there. The brown-shirts had made these arrests in the Berlin stock exchange and Göring could not countenance the seizure of such financially influential men. But such events were exceptions. As a rule the Nazi “Auxiliary Police” abducted, arrested and tortured whoever they wanted, completely unhindered and in this way of course many old accounts were settled. Since 28th February 1933 there had even existed a formal legal basis for these violent

excesses. Hindenburg’s “Reichstag fire decree” declared first a “civil state of emergency” in accordance with the relevant paragraphs in the Weimar Constitution, then suspended most basic and civil rights and heavily increased the punishment for alleged or actual political crimes. The reaction in Berlin to the explosion of violence in March and April 1933 was palpable. Members of the communist factions were severely ill-treated by the SA hordes and many of them disappeared underground. Scores of SPD officials also fell into the hands of the torturers. Yet the lower and middle classes did not revolt against this patently NSDAP brutality and nor did the military or the organised working classes. This was because support for the National Socialists had now become widespread. On 12th March 1933 in the (last) local elections, 984,467 Berliners voted for Hitler which represented 40% of the 2.5 million votes cast overall and about as many as the KPD and SPD had polled jointly.

At the beginning of March 1933 Hitler and the NSDAP more or less controlled the German capital and the cabinet was already essentially powerless. However the reactionaries around Papen and Hugenberg not only didn’t notice that Hitler would not be “pushed into the background”, they obediently fell into insignificance. Now the NSDAP began to extend their power into the other parts of Germany, mainly using the same methods as they had in Berlin. Thousands of actual or alleged opponents of Nazism were taken away and tortured. Dozens of them were murdered. The largest wave of emigration in Germany history began. It was above all KPD officials, intellectuals and wealthy citizens from a Jewish

background who realised that they were no longer safe in their homeland. On 23rd March 1933 the NSDAP made a temporary halt to extending their power. On this day Hitler assembled the newly elected representative body of the people in the Kroll Opera House, a building opposite the burnt out Reichstag, which was empty at the time (now this site to the south of the Federal Republic Chancellor's office is a stretch of lawn) and passed a sweeping "Enabling Act". The KPD representatives had already been stripped of their mandates and of the remaining parliamentary parties; only the Social Democrats had the courage to vote against Hitler. Otto Wels, the leader of the SPD at the time, made a speech which enraged the Reich Chancellor but the bill got the necessary majority to effect a constitutional amendment. The Enabling Act, which conferred all power on the Reich Chancellor, remained the legal basis of Adolf Hitler's rule force until the suicide of the "Führer and Reich Chancellor" on 30th April 1945. It formed the Basic Law of the Third Reich.

Armed with this new authority Hitler now set about stabilising his power base. Within a few months public life in Germany had been completely turned upside down by a raft of laws. By the summer the government had banned all other political parties, if they hadn't already dissolved themselves. More than 10,000 Nazi opponents were held in the "unofficial KZs" of the SA and the first official concentration camps like Dachau near Munich and



On 1st August 1933 SPD politicians are taken away to the Oranienburg concentration camp just outside Berlin.

Oranienburg just outside Berlin. In the capital itself the barracks on General-Pape-Strasse (partially still standing) and the military detention centre on Columbiadamm (today the site of north-east wing of the Tempelhof Airport building and a scarcely noticed memorial to the inmates of the Columbia-Haus KZ) were used as prisons and torture chambers. The end of June 1933 witnessed a particularly appalling excess of violence during the first months of Nazi rule. In Köpenick, a south-east borough of Berlin, SA troops gruesomely murdered at least 25 people, mainly trade union officials, communists and social democrats, in the space of five days. This wave of murders has gone down in history as the "Köpenick week of blood" and at the main scene of the crime, the district court on Puchanstrasse, there is today a memorial to the victims.

Popular Dictatorship

“Falling into line”

Despite the unprecedented wave of violence during the first six months of 1933 there was widespread approval for Hitler and his politics. In the Reichstag elections on 5th March 1933, 17.4 million Germans (43.9%) had voted for Hitler, among them 400,000 Berliners (31.3%). Whilst this was not a majority, it was an enormous number. On any given occasion Goebbels and his Berlin NSDAP had no problems in mobilising tens of thousands of enthusiastic followers, even if this number was not as high as the Gauleiter, now promoted to Minister for Propaganda, liked to claim in his diary and in the newspapers. In the first few months of Hitler's government the NSDAP attracted new members on a massive scale, mainly for reasons of opportunism. In the end, after membership had tripled, the party called a halt to new subscriptions on 1st May 1933. It is not known exactly how many of the capital's population became “party comrades” during these weeks, but it is certain to have been a very large number. A derisive nickname for those new recruits who eagerly offered their services to the new dictators soon crept into the Berlin vernacular – they were referred to as, “March

Heroes”, alluding cynically to the description of the rebels who fell at the barricades in March 1848. At the same time a process of “falling in line” began in large sections of Berlin society and indeed all over Germany. At the venerable Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität on Unter den Linden (now Humboldt-Universität) the members of the National Socialist Student Union expelled staff who were either Jewish or known to be left-wing; almost 250 lecturers were forced to leave the University. The political climate there had already been revealed in the elections to the student council the previous year, when two thirds of the Berlin students voted for the NSDAP.

Even more shameful was the behaviour of many Berlin journalists. In January 1933, alongside the conservative Scherl-Verlag controlled by the leader of the DNVP, Alfred Hugenberg, and the National Socialist publications such as the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the *Angriff*, there were two big publishers: the Moses-Verlag, whose publications included the most influential German newspaper, the *Berliner Tagesblatt*, and the Ullstein-Verlag, Europe's largest newspaper publisher's, which owned the *Berliner Morgenpost*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country, the



Berliners sitting round the base of the Victory Column (which was then on the square in front of the Reichstag) listening to the transmission of one of Hitler's speeches in May 1935.

Vossische Zeitung, an important voice of the bourgeoisie and the B.Z. am Mittag, in its time the "fastest" paper of the press in the world. Both publishers were run by liberal German-Jewish families. After Hitler's appointment as Reich Chancellor it became clear that in both companies there were journalists who to some extent shared the National Socialists' views and who also caught wind of a good career move. In nearly all the editorial offices the pressure to adapt to the wishes of the new government built up. The NS sympathisers soon exerted great influence over the formation of public opinion. With the help of an anonymous corporate finance company "Cautio Ltd", it was easy enough for the NSDAP to swal-

low up the Mosse-Verlag because it had been insolvent since the autumn of 1932. The strong man of the NS press (and Goebbels' competitor), Max Amann, needed slightly longer to take over the Ullstein-Press, but in 1934 he had control here too. The Ullstein brothers were forced to sell their company to "Cautio" at a price far below its value and before this all Jewish journalists had already been dismissed. Even radio, still a new medium at this time and under the direct control of the State, quickly became totally dependent. On the evening of 30th January 1933 the "Reichsfunk" radio stations in Stuttgart and Munich had succeeded in refusing to broadcast Goebbels' first address, but a week

later the NS Minister for Home Affairs, Wilhelm Frick, had gained total control over the radio journalists. Here too young careerists were promoted to replace colleagues who had either been removed or remained critical of the regime. The way that Berlin journalism, once so self-confident, fell in line with the Nazis is the greatest defeat that this profession has ever experienced.

In almost all walks of Berlin society the same thing happened as in the University and the press. The economy adapted to the new order, as did wide sections of the Protestant Church. In the Martin Luther Memorial Church in Marienfelde a bust of Hitler was even erected in the lobby and in the pulpit a uniformed Hitler Youth can still be seen on one of the reliefs. The workers stood by and watched as the unions were crushed. Hitler had made a clever tactical move in declaring 1st May 1933 the “National Workers’ Holiday”. On the morning of 2nd May SA troops occupied the union bases, disbanded their organisations and incorporated all workers in the newly created “German Workers’ Front”. This happened all over Germany as well as in Berlin, but it was in the capital where the changes usually first took effect. On 12th November 1933, in the first “election” of the Third Reich where only a “unified list of candidates” which voters could either approve or otherwise, 85.1% of Berliners voted for Hitler. Of course, the voting slips were all numbered so that a secret ballot no longer existed. The actual percentage of Berliners who agreed with Hitler was therefore certainly lower; but whether it was 60, 70 or 80% is naturally pure speculation.

The beginning of the persecution of the Jews

The German-Jewish population had been suffering from attacks by Hitler’s followers since 1924. All through the years of the Weimar Republic shop windows were repeatedly smashed in and Nazi pamphlets stirred up hatred against “Jewish” Berlin department stores such as Wertheim and Tietz (Hertie). Even before 1933 Goebbels had on various occasions directed his SA men to specifically target Berlin Jews. But as violent as some of these attacks had been, they did not seem even worth mentioning in comparison with the brutal acts that were to follow after 30th January. On 17th February the Nazis stormed an examination at the Staatliche Kunsthochschule (State Art Academy) in Charlottenburg (today the University of the Arts on Hardenbergstrasse) and beat up the “Jewish” Professors. On the night of the Reichstag fire SA men attacked the Berlin offices of the Jewish “Central Club” and during the weeks that followed they abducted numerous Jews, mostly still because they were KPD or SPD officials, not because of their religion or their “Jewish race”. The majority were tortured and some were killed. The first Berlin Jew who was murdered for his faith was probably Siegbert Kindermann, an 18 year old baker’s apprentice. A year earlier he had gone to the police to report harassment by an SA man who on 18th March 1933 sought his gruesome revenge. Many more victims followed – nobody knows exactly how many and yet the Deputy Reich Chancellor, Franz von Papen, tried to calm things down by writing to the German-American Chamber of Commerce. As



SA men blockade the shops owned by Jews on 1st April 1933 – pictured is a clothes shop on the Kurfürstendamm.

the New York Times reported on 29th March, the man who had helped Hitler come to power stressed in his official letter that there had been “less than a dozen” attacks on Jews with US passports and that there were hundreds of thousands of German Jews who were living unmolested.

The new rulers, however, wanted to change all this. Since the Nazis had taken over, it was the lower ranks which were particularly keen to start hitting out at the “Jewry”. Together with Goebbels, the Gauleiter of the NSDAP in Franken, Julius Streicher, an ardent antisemite and publisher of the propagandist paper “Der Stürmer”, took the wishes of their party comrades to heart and got Hitler to declare that on Saturday, 1st April Jewish shops all over Germany would be boycotted. On the previous night NS followers stuck large posters on the advertising columns of the capital with-

out any regard for the (paid-for) adverts already there. They bore the words: “Jews have until 10 o’clock on Saturday to think things over. Then the battle begins. Jews all over the world want to destroy Germany. German people! Defend yourselves! Don’t buy your goods from Jews!” Part of the poster was written in two languages, in German and in English, because the pretext for the boycott was the fact that British and American newspapers were considering declaring an economic embargo against Germany and there had never been any concrete measures taken by international governments. The photos of SA men, standing in front of shop entrances, went round the world. Some of them were holding printed signs calling for a boycott and others had handwritten slogans like, “Danger! Jews get out!” or “Look out Itzig! Go to Palestine!”. KaDeWe on Wittenbergplatz and other

“Jewish” department stores stayed shut, but Karstadt on Hermannplatz remained open; the day before the management had dismissed all Jewish employees “as a precaution”.

Joseph Goebbels noted enthusiastically in his diary: “All along the Tauentzien. Everything under boycott. Exemplary discipline. An impressive spectacle. Everything going calmly.” But in reality the “Jew boycott” was not a success in Berlin. It’s true that in the main shopping areas – on the Kurfürstendamm, on Potsdamerplatz and Alexanderplatz as well as in Friedrichstrasse and Leipzigerstrasse – there were groups of people watching the SA guards and sometimes cheering them on; the Frankfurter Zeitung reported from the capital that the boycott ended up like a “Peoples’ festival”. However, the anti-Semitic spark did not ignite the majority of Berliners as Goebbels and Streicher were hoping. People were only afraid to enter the “Jewish shops” where SA troops were deployed; some Berliners met with no resistance when they consciously disregarded the boycott, for example the writer Erich Ebermayer: “There are two SA men standing in front of the entrance, but the shop is not closed. You can go inside and buy something if you have the courage. M. and I have the courage (...) When we step inside the shop the SA man says to us each time in a totally polite, disciplined manner: ‘Jewish Shop!’ Just as courteously and calmly we reply: ‘Thank you, we know that.’ An astonished look from the SA man, but never any rudeness.” In Kronenstrasse, Mitte, where Berliners could buy exclusive clothes, trade was a lot worse than on normal Saturdays, but there were still customers despite the SA guards standing in front of many of the shops.

International reaction to the boycott was disastrous. For instance the British Ambassador reported back to his Foreign Minister: “In my opinion it would therefore be a mistake to condemn the whole German Nation for a measure which has not just aroused the outrage and abhorrence of the Diplomatic Corps but also of many Germans themselves.” In view of the unsatisfactory support by Berliners and the negative effect abroad Goebbels did not extend the one day boycott. Together with all his accomplices he found other ways to oppress the 160,000 Jews in Berlin. On 1st April all Jewish doctors working for the State were dismissed; on 3rd April all Jewish teachers were “sent on leave”; on 7th April all the grants for kindergartens in the Jewish community were withdrawn and three days later the financial support for Jewish pupils in need was also stopped. In the same period Jewish children were banned from using the public swimming pool in Gartenstrasse (Mitte). Also on 7th April the “law for restoring the civil service with tenure” came into force all over Germany, requiring that all Jewish state employees would be dismissed. From this point onwards Jews were gradually banned from any activity that occurred to the resourceful civil servants. It certainly wasn’t only or even especially the NS officials who had the perverse imagination to make the lives of the Jewish Berliners increasingly difficult. Those responsible were mainly local civil servants who wanted to show proof of their “reliability” when it came to carrying out Hitler’s policies.

A nationwide action began, “Against the un-German spirit”, which meant against Jews or any other supposed “foreign ele-