

A CLUE



The Reichstag building on fire: 27th February 1933,
reportedly set on fire by Dutch Communist Marinus van der
Lubbe

A CLUE

K. Bracher (historian)

***[Brüning] was not...
the last chancellor
before the break-up of
the Weimar Republic,
but the first chancellor
in the process of
destroying German
democracy***

A CLUE

Goebbels' Diary in 1932

13th Aug: Nothing is more difficult than to tell victory flushed troops that victory has been snatched out of their hands.

14th Aug: Great hopelessness reigns among the party comrades.

15th Oct: Party workers become very nervous as a result of these everlasting elections. They are overworked.

8th Dec: Severe depression prevails... financial worries render all systematic work impossible... The danger now exists of the whole Party going to pieces... Dr Ley telephones that the situation is becoming more critical from hour to hour... For hours on end, the Führer walks anxiously up and down the hotel room... Once he stops and merely says: 'If the Party should ever break up, I'll make an end of things in three minutes with a revolver.'

15th Dec: It is hard to hold the SA and the Party officials to a clear course... If we succeed in holding the movement together we shall also succeed in saving the situation.

29 Dec: It is possible that in a few days, the Führer will have a conference with Papen. There a new chance opens.

A CLUE

T. Childers, the Formation of the Nazi Constituency, 1986

After an ascent of unparalleled swiftness, the NSDAP had reached the limits of its electoral potential and now [in December 1932] faced almost certain decline. The policy of legality, of mass mobilisation for electoral campaigning had reached a dead end.

A CLUE

Industrialists' letter to Hindenburg, November 1932

Your Excellency! Like you, we are imbued with an impassioned love of the German people and the Fatherland... together with Your Excellency, we agree that it is necessary to create a government independent of the parliamentary parties...

The outcome of the Reichstag elections of 6th November has demonstrated that the present cabinet, whose honest intentions no one among the German people would doubt, has failed to find sufficient support among the German people for its actual policies... It is quite apparent that another dissolution of parliament, leading to yet another general election would be inimicable to political as well as economic peace and widespread popular support would have even greater negative economic, political and moral effects.

We therefore consider it to be our duty, Your Excellency, to humbly beg you to consider reconstituting the cabinet in a manner which would guarantee it with the greatest possible popular support.

We declare ourselves to be free from any specific party-political interests. But we recognise in the nationalist movement, which is sweeping through our people, the auspicious beginning of an era of rebirth for the German economy which can only be achieved by the surmounting of class conflict. We know that the rebirth will demand great sacrifices. We believe that these sacrifices will only be made willingly when the greater part of this nationalist movement plays a leading role in the government.

The transfer of responsibility for leading a Presidential cabinet to the leader of the largest nationalist group would remove the waste and slag that inevitably clings to any mass movement. As a result millions of people who at present still stand on the sidelines would be swept into active participation.

We greet Your Excellency with the greatest respect.

Bosch, Schacht, Thyssen, Krupp [and 20 other industrialists]

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An account by Otto Meissner, State Secretary in Hindenburg's office made to the Nuremberg Tribunal after the Second World War

Despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler Chancellor. He wanted to have Papen again as Chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were missed, a revolt of the national socialists and civil war were likely.

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1932 DNVP poster. It says “More power to the presidency! Away with the supremacy of Parliament, Vote Nationalist!”

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September 1932 cartoon by John Heartfield

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16 October 1932, John Heartfield, magazine front cover: “The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little man asks for big gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!”

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Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*

Access to Hindenburg was the key to power. Accordingly, the presidential palace became the focal point of intrigues of power brokers who, freed from institutional constraints, conspired with guile and initiative in private wheeler-dealings to further their own power ambitions. And behind the maverick power-brokers stood the lobbying of important elite groups, anxious to attain a political solution of the crisis favourable to their interests.

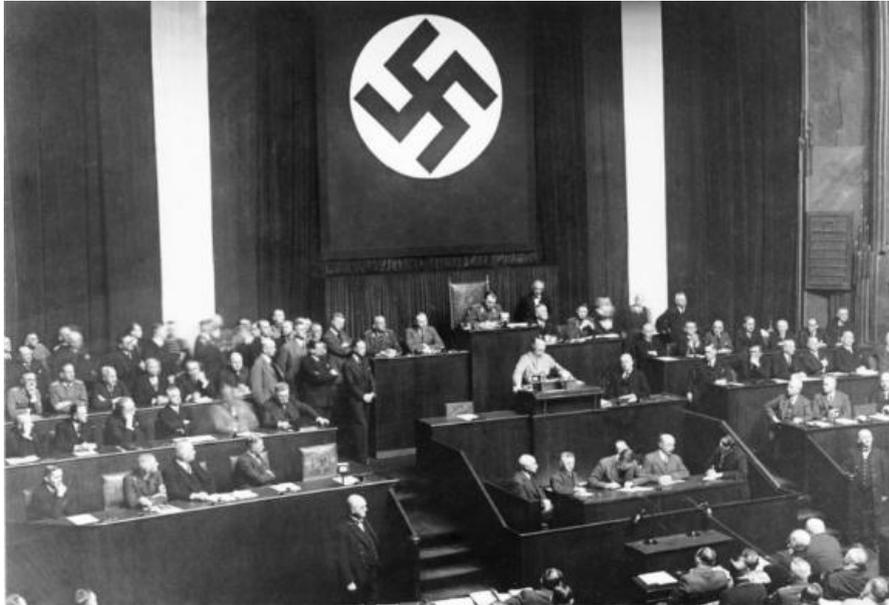
Few... had Hitler as their first choice. But by January 1933, with other options apparently exhausted, most, with the big landowners to the force, were prepared to entertain a Hitler government. Had they opposed it, a Hitler chancellorship would have been inconceivable. Hitler needed the elite to attain power. But by January 1933, they in turn needed Hitler as he alone could deliver the mass support required to impose a tenable authoritarian solution to Germany's crisis of capitalism and crisis of the state.

A CLUE

The distinguished banker Johannes Zahn explains his feelings in the early 1930s

You have to consider Germany's general position [in] 1930-33. An unemployed man either joined the Communists or became an SA man, and so business believed it was better if these people became storm troopers as there was discipline and order... you really have to say this today, at the beginning you couldn't tell whether National Socialism was something good with a few bad side effects, or something evil with a few good side-effects; you couldn't tell.

A CLUE



The Enabling Act, March 1933

(passed by Hitler following the Reichstag Fire)

Article 1: In addition to the procedure for the passage of legislation outlined in the Constitution, the Reich cabinet is also authorised to enact Laws...

Article 2: The national laws enacted by the Reich cabinet may deviate from the Constitution provided they do not affect the position of the Reichstag and Reichsrat. The powers of the President remain unaffected.

Article 3: The national laws enacted by the Reich cabinet shall be prepared by the Chancellor and published in the official gazette. They come into effect, unless otherwise stated, upon the day following their publication.

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Decree of the Reich President on the Protection of the People and the State, 28 February 1933

On the basis of Article 48, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the Reich, the following is decreed as a protection against communist acts of violence endangering the state

1. Sections 114, 115, 11, 118, 123, 124 and 153 of the Constitution of the German Reich are suspended until further notice. Thus restrictions on personal liberty, on the right of free expression of opinion, including freedom of the press, on the right of assembly and association... are permissible beyond the legal limits otherwise prescribed.

2. If in any German state the measures necessary for the restoration of public security and order are not taken, the Reich Government may temporarily take over the powers of the supreme authority in such a state in order to restore security...

This decree applies from the day of publication, Berlin 28th February 1933.

A CLUE

William L. Shirer in the Rise and Fall of the Third Reich

On the occasion of a lunch on the Führer's birthday in 1943, the people around the Führer turned the conversation to the Reichstag building and its artistic value. I heard with my own ears how Göring broke into the conversation and shouted: 'The only one who really knows about the Reichstag building is I, for I set fire to it.' And saying this he slapped his thigh.

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Goering's testimony at the 1945-1946
Nuremberg Trials

I had no reason or motive for setting fire to the Reichstag. From the artistic point of view I did not at all regret that the assembly chamber was burned; I hoped to build a better one. But I did regret very much that I was forced to find a new meeting place for the Reichstag and, not being able to find one, I had to give up my Kroll Opera House ... for that purpose. The opera seemed to me much more important than the Reichstag.

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

On February 27, 1933, the German parliament (Reichstag) building burned down due to arson. The government falsely portrayed the fire as part of a Communist effort to overthrow the state.

Using emergency constitutional powers, Adolf Hitler's cabinet had issued a Decree for the Protection of the German People on February 4, 1933. This decree placed constraints on the press and authorized the police to ban political meetings and marches, effectively hindering electoral campaigning. A temporary measure, it was followed by a more dramatic and permanent suspension of civil rights following the February 27 burning of the parliament building.

Though the origins of the fire are still unclear, in a propaganda manoeuvre, the coalition government (Nazis and the German Nationalist People's Party) blamed the Communists. They exploited the Reichstag fire to secure President von Hindenburg's approval for an emergency decree, the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State of February 28. Popularly known as the Reichstag Fire Decree, the regulations suspended the right to assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and other constitutional protections, including all restraints on police investigations.

The Reichstag Fire Decree permitted the regime to arrest and incarcerate political opponents without specific charge, dissolve political organizations, and to suppress publications. It also gave the central government the authority to overrule state and local laws and overthrow state and local governments.

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1934 Cartoon, by David Low (British Cartoonist)

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A selection of responses to the Night of the Long Knives

Defence Minister Werner von Blomberg, 5th July 1934

The Führer with soldierly decision and exemplary courage has himself attacked and crushed the traitors and murderers. The Army, as the bearers of arms of the entire people, far removed from the conflicts of domestic politics will show its gratitude through devotion and loyalty.

President Hindenburg on the Night of the Long Knives

Through your decisive intervention and your courageous personal commitment you have nipped all the treasonably intrigues in the bud. You have saved the German nation from serious danger and for this I express to you my deeply felt gratitude and my sincere appreciation.

A Saxon small businessman

The main thing is that he has freed us from the Marxists and has got rid of the harmful influence of the dreadful SA even if he is a mass murderer.

Intelligence reports from socialist party agents within Germany to SOPADE (Social Democratic Party in Exile) on public reactions

Wide sections of the population have gained the impression... that through his brutal energy Hitler has prevented a much greater bloodbath. He has paved the way for a moral renewal and elevated his standing as the cleaners of the Movement all the more as the muck was raked out into full view.

A CLUE

John Hite and Chris Hinton, *Weimar and Nazi Germany* textbook

The Night of the Long Knives was where Hitler purged the SA (and other enemies). It marked a major shift in the development of Hitler's dictatorship. In different ways, he had triumphed over both the Left and the Right. He had tamed the radicals in the SA and won the support of the elite, most crucially the army. The generals were conciliated by the weakening of the army's rival, the SA, and a promise that they would retain a monopoly of armed force. They hoped that with the SA weakened, the army's influence would increase. Some generals proposed the army take an oath to tie Hitler and the army together. So when Hindenburg died, all soldiers took a new oath of personal loyalty to their Führer, replacing the traditional oath of loyalty to the Führer.

The greatest winner of all was undoubtedly Hitler. He had gained the acceptance of the legalised murder of opponents. This served to intimidate future opponents and embolden him. The traditional organs of the state had accepted his actions. Most of the German people accepted the view that as their Führer he would act only for the good of the nation.

A CLUE

American Historian E. Anderson, 'The Struggle for Democracy in Germany' in J. Snell and A. Mitchell, *The Nazi Revolution: Germany's Guilt or Germany's Fate?*

It would be wrong to conclude that Nazism grew inevitably from the German past. This theory would imply fatalism [that an event must happen] which is entirely out of place in any serious study of history. A careful analysis of the events of 1932-33 shows that at that time a substantial majority of the German people favoured an extraordinary increase in governmental authority necessary to solve their problems but opposed National Socialism, that this majority was increasing, and that the recession lessening of the economic crisis would have entailed further losses of Nazi popular support. A relatively small group of Junkers, industrialists, and militarists actually achieved Hitler's appointment as chancellor and utilised the senility of President von Hindenburg to accomplish its purpose. The group expected to control the Nazis and to exploit the Nazi power for its own purposes; but the National Socialists proved too clever and too ruthless for it.

A CLUE

British historian Ian Kershaw, *Hitler*

There was nothing inevitable about Hitler's triumph in January 1933. Five years earlier, the Nazi Party had been a fringe irritant in German politics, but no more... External events, the Young Plan to adjust German reparations payments, the Wall Street Crash, and Brüning's entirely unnecessary decision to have an election in summer 1930- put the Nazis on the political map. Though democracy had by that time an unpromising future, a Nazi dictatorship seemed far less likely than some other form of authoritarian dictatorship or even a reversion to a Bismarckian style of government, possibly under a restored monarchy. In bringing Hitler to power, chance events and conservative miscalculation played a larger role than any actions of the Nazi leader himself.

A CLUE

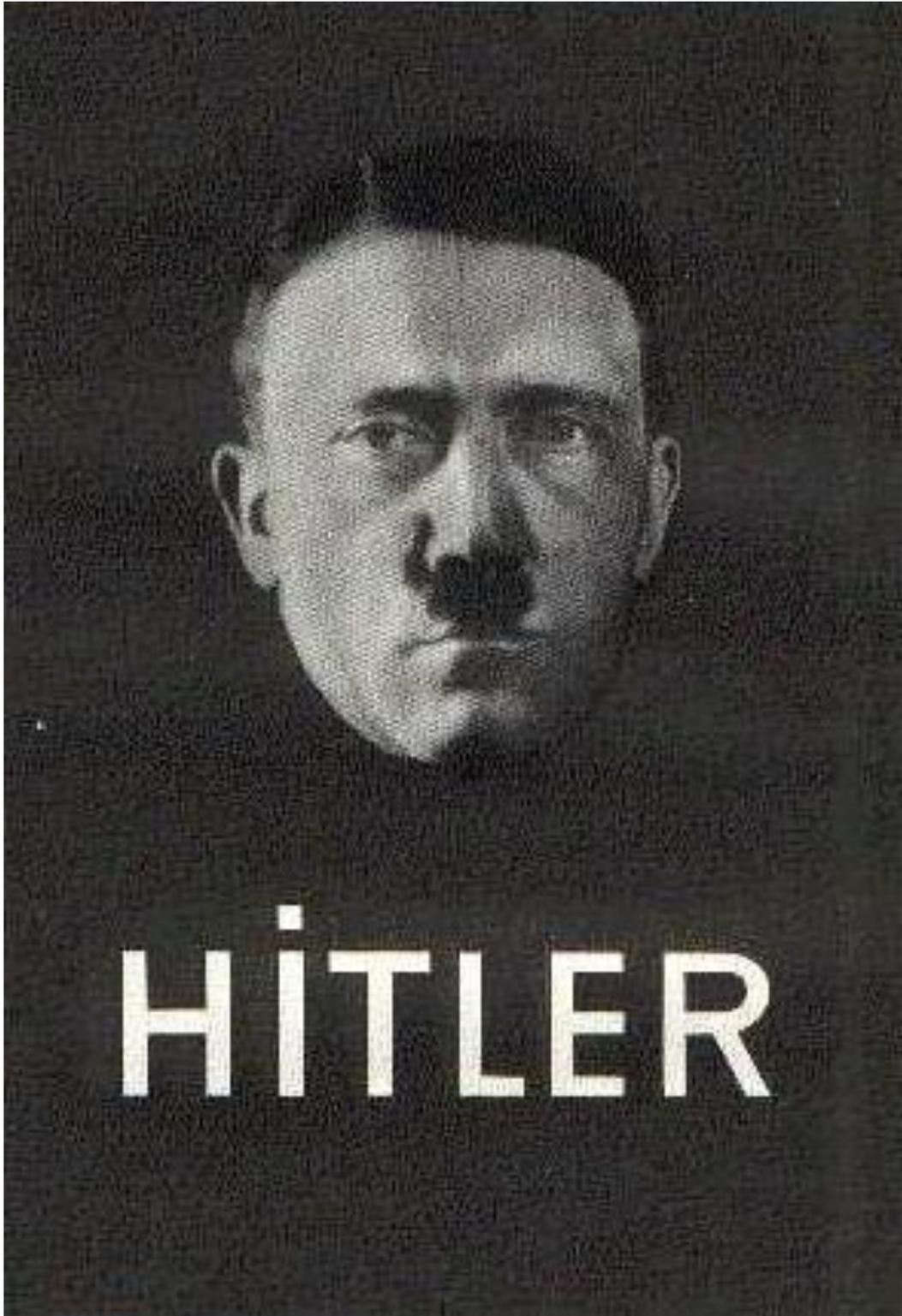
German historian G. Ritter, 1955

The Weimar Republic failed because it did not succeed in winning general confidence, in becoming genuinely popular through successes which could be appreciated from a distance. So the rejection of democratic slogans became one of the essential conditions for the rise of Hitler's party. But to attribute this rejection simply to 'the Germans lack of sense of liberty' explains nothing; it only disguises with a grand phrase the true historical problem; the reasons why the chances of liberals have much diminished in this century, particularly in Germany after the First World War...

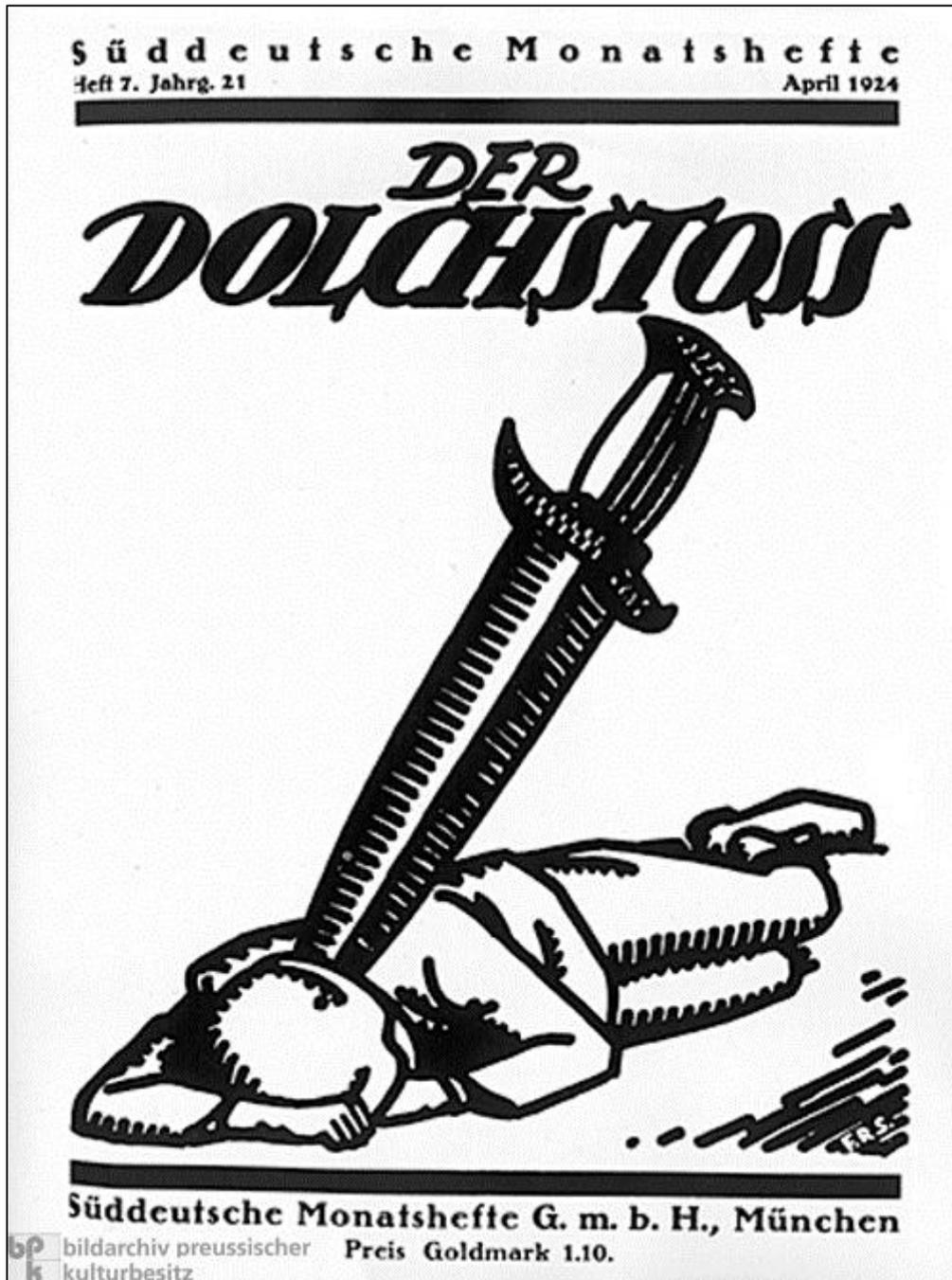
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Right wing propaganda, April 1924

A CLUE

HITLER MADE CHANCELLOR OF GERMANY BUT COALITION CABINET LIMITS POWER; CENTRISTS HOLD BALANCE IN REICHSTAG

GROUP FORMED BY PAPEN

Nationalists to Dominate
in Government Led by
National Socialist.

DR. HUGENBERG GETS POST

Frick in Interior Ministry to
Control Police, but Army Has
Non-Partisan Chief.

REDS URGE STRIKE TODAY

Cabinet Stresses That It Will
Not Attempt Monetary or
Economic Experiments.

By GUIDO ENDERIS.

Special Cable to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
BERLIN, Jan. 30.—Adolf Hitler,
leader of the National Socialist
party, today was appointed Chan-
cellor of Germany after being twice
rejected last year for that office.

Herr Hitler was maneuvered into
heading a coalition government of
National Socialists and Nationalists
by Lieut. Col. Franz von Papen,
former Chancellor. The new Cab-
inet is a compromise between a
Presidential and a Parliamentary
government.

The composition of the Cabinet
leaves Herr Hitler no scope for
gratification of any dictatorial am-
bition. He accepted the Chan-
cellorship on less sweeping terms than
he laid down in his audiences with
the President in August and No-
vember of last year. He swore
obedience to the republican Consti-
tution today after the President
had accepted Colonel von Papen's
Cabinet plans.

The New Cabinet.

The new Cabinet is composed as
follows:

Chancellor—Adolf Hitler.

Hitler Pledges Fight in Cabinet

By the Associated Press.

BERLIN, Jan. 30.—A proclamation emphasizing that the
present Cabinet is not truly representative of Hitlerism and the
nation was issued today by the new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler.
In it the Nazi leader announced a determination to "carry on the
fight within the government as tenaciously as we fought outside."

"After a thirteen-year struggle the National Socialist move-
ment has succeeded in breaking through to the government; the
struggle to win the German nation, however, is only beginning,"
the proclamation said.

"The National Socialist party knows that the new govern-
ment is no National Socialist Government, but it is conscious
that it bears the name of its leader, Adolf Hitler. He has ad-
vanced with his shock troops and has placed himself at the head
of the government to lead the German people to liberty.

"Not only is the entire authority of State ready to be wielded,
but in the background, prepared for action, is the National So-
cialist movement of millions of followers united unto death with
its leaders. Our historic mission is now in the field of political
economy."

Calling Herr Hitler's appointment "historic," the document
lauded President von Hindenburg with these words:

"In this hour we wish to thank President von Hindenburg,
whose immortal fame as a Field Marshal in the battlefields of
the World War binds his name perpetually to that of young Ger-
many, which is striving with burning heart to gain its liberty."

MODERATE CABINET PLANNED IN FRANCE

Daladier Is Unable to Get
Socialist Support and
Turns to Centre.

HITLER IS MADE AN ISSUE

Premier-Designate Rejects Left
Demands for Cut in Military
Budget on Berlin News.

By F. J. PHILIP.

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
PARIS, Tuesday, Jan. 31.—France
this morning was moving rapidly
toward a new governmental align-
ment. Halted by the demands of
the Socialists in forming a Cabinet

HOOVER SKEPTICAL OF SUCCESS ON DEBT

Sees Roosevelt Making Wrong
Approach—Holds Economic
Topics Should Come First.

QUICK ACTION HIS AIM

He Favored Joint Stand With
Britain at World Parley—
London Discusses Debts.

By ARTHUR KROCK.

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
WASHINGTON, Jan. 30.—Since
the visit of Sir Ronald Lindsay,
British Ambassador, to President
Roosevelt at Warm Springs,

The Front Page of the New York Times on the day Hitler became Chancellor of Germany

A CLUE



SPD poster, 1930: against the Middle Class Block and the Swastika

A CLUE



Hitler being sworn in as Chancellor by Hindenburg in 1933

