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9 November: Hitler unsuccessfully attempts to gain power in a putsch

A native-born Austrian, Adolf Hitler is the president of the nationalist anti-Semitic National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), or the 'Nazi Party', from 1921. During the First World War, he served as a dispatch runner for a Bavarian infantry regiment and received the Iron Cross Second and First Class military decorations for bravery. After the end of the war, the unskilled and unemployed Hitler initially became active in Munich's Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, before he was appointed to the reconnaissance commando of Reichswehr Command 4 in the Weimar Republic's Army in Munich in 1919. He was schooled in antibolschewistischen Aufklärungskursen (anti-Bolshevist training courses), in order ultimately to be able to infiltrate and observe the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. Thanks to his clear talent for rhetoric and what, in the meantime, had become an obviously committed anti-Bolshevist attitude, Hitler quickly advanced in this career path. Together with other Aufkärern (scouts), Hitler is commanded to the Army camp at Lechfeld in Bavaria, with orders to agitate and influence the soldiers towards nationalist ideas and beliefs. During this opportunity, Hitler truly comes to recognise his talent for rhetoric and the effect of anti-Semitic stereotypes in political arguments. In the autumn of 1919, his commanding officer in the reconnaissance organisation, Karl Mayr, brings Hitler in contact with Ernst Röhm, the leader of the nationalist-national officers' group Iron Fist, with whom he quickly strikes up an acquaintance. Subsequently, Röhm will lead the Nazi Sturmabteilung or SA (literally Storm Detachment, also known as Storm troopers), a paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, until he is murdered in 1934. Ultimately, in September 1919, Mayr sends Hitler to a meeting of the nationalist splinter party, the German Workers' Party (DAP), in Munich, with the aim of observing, infiltrating and, should the occasion arise, manipulating the organisation. While there, Hitler gives an energetic and rousing speech, and consequently comes to the attention of the Party president, Anton Draxler. Draxler persuades Hitler to join the DAP. With Mayr's permission, Hitler becomes a member of the DAP in October 1919. The new DAP party member also impresses Dietrich Eckart, an anti-Semitic writer, who has a significant ideological influence on Hitler. Eckart's extensive links within the upper and middle classes of Munich mean that Hitler rapidly gains access to high society and influential circles in the Bavarian capital city. Hitler comes into contact with and gets to know a number of financially strong sponsors within the antidemocratic folk-nationalist political scene. Hitler appears before increasingly large crowds of people in his role of campaigner, and he aspires to a leadership role in the DAP. Very quickly, everyone in Munich has heard of the radical agitator with his unique talent as a speaker. In February, the DAP changes its name to the NSDAP - the National Socialist German Workers' Party, best known simply as the Nazi Party. Strongly influenced by Hitler, a form of radical racist anti-Semitism becomes the main

..... programmatic feature of the Nazi Party. In July 1921, Hitler finally grabs the party leadership of the Nazi party for himself, and reorganises the leadership into an authoritarian Führer principle (leader principle). The Nazi Party is now entirely subordinated to the will of its party leader. The SA is established as a paramilitary fighting troop that will provide protection for but also fight on behalf of the party, disrupt opponents meetings, and fight in the general political struggle on the streets.



During the year of the occupation of the Ruhr and hyperinflation, Hitler quickly saw a chance to extend his sphere of influence beyond the limited current field of Bavaria, and to capture attention across the entire empire. In the chaotic autumn of 1923, proletarische Arbeiterbewegungen (proletarian workers' movements) start to emerge in Saxony and Thuringia, while Bavaria's government furiously pursues a strong right-wing course against Gustav Stresemann's government and his cancellation of the battle for the Ruhr. France supports separatist movements in the Rhineland and the Palatinate. A highly explosive combination of nationalist politicians, soldiers and industrialists make plans for a coup d'état, even though the so-called Kapp Putsch in 1920 had already failed. Hitler aims to exploit the serious conflict and disagreements between Berlin and Bavaria, which is under the leadership of Gustav Ritter von Kahr, the Minister President of Bavaria, who governs in a state of emergency with full dictatorial powers. The 'national revolution' is to be proclaimed in Munich, and power is to be seized through a march on Berlin, based on the Italian model of Benito Mussolini. In addition to Hitler, representing an extreme nationalist party, General Erich Ludendorff, a former leader of the Supreme Army Command (OHL), was to take part in the putsch as a representative from the military. However Hitler soon recognises that von Kahr, who is equally hostile towards the republic, is highly unlikely to concede a major role to Hitler in the struggle for the 'national revolution', given that von Kahr would far prefer to take action against democracy himself. As a result, Hitler and Ludendorff spontaneously organise a putsch on 8 November when von Kahr is holding a nationalist meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller, a large beer hall in Munich. With his pistol drawn, Hitler jumps onto a chair, fires a shot into the ceiling and announces the 'national revolution' that would begin the next day. Hitler forces von Kahr, General Otto von Lossow, the Bavarian military regional commander of the Reichswehr Imperial Army, and Colonel Hans von Seisser, the head of the Bavarian State Police, into an adjoining room at gunpoint. While Hermann Göring, at this time the head of the SA gives a speech in the main hall, Hitler pressures the government officials to cooperate. Hitler, Ludendorff, von Lossow and von Seißer are named as leaders of the provisional German national government. Nevertheless, early on the morning of 9 November, von Kahr - who has been released by the coup d'état leaders in the meantime - announces the collapse of the revolution on radio, and that a ban is to be placed on the Nazi Party. In spite of this, Hitler, Ludendorff and many other armed rebels march to the Munich Feldherrenhalle with the aim of initiating a powerful demonstration from this location so that they might somehow still make the uprising a success, even though, in reality, it was already a failure. During this march, however, shots



are fired at Bavarian state police officers, who respond with machine gun fire. The
march disperses, with a count of 18 dead. Ludendorff is arrested; Hitler escapes
but is also arrested soon after. The putsch has failed miserably. Hitler is put on
trial for high treason, or high treason; however, despite the severity of his actions,
he is given a comparably mild sentence. In what can easily be interpreted as a
sympathetic hearing, the judge sentences Hitler to five years' imprisonment, with
the prospect of early release after just six months. After nine months' detention in
Landsberg am Lech, Hitler is released for good behaviour. Ludendorff is acquitted.



The failure of the Hitler putsch as a result of von Kahr's resistance and the Bavarian state police's rapid response indicates that the self-defence mechanisms of the Weimar Republic had not yet completely run out of steam in 1923. At the same time, the scandalously mild judgements against Hitler and Ludendorff, as well as Hitler's early release, do give a clear indication of how weakly embedded the concepts of democracy and the rule of law are in the consciousness of many leading officials in the Empire. The danger from right wing extremism, which is a very real threat to freedom, is underestimated by too many. Many individuals even want to do away with this right to freedom. And yet, in spite of its failure, the putsch is, in fact, a success for Hitler. He is now known across the entire empire, and he gained countless new supporters during the trial through his self-styling as a supposed fighter for national honour. During his period of imprisonment, he writes his programmatic, but intellectually and conceptually extremely confused, work Mein Kampf. As a political consequence of the putsch, Hitler decides to strive towards power by navigating the legal path of elections – and with success, as will soon be seen. After 1933, the rebels who died during the putsch are honoured every year as Blutzeugen der Bewegung (martyrs of the movement) in a morbid national ritual and, thus, are once again able to be exploited by the Führer for his own propagandistic purposes.

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