

The Munich Putsch Story

On 8th November, 1923, the Bavarian government held a meeting of about 3,000 officials. While Gustav von Kahr the prime minister of Bavaria was making a speech, Adolf Hitler and armed stormtroopers entered the building. Hitler jumped onto a table, fired two shots in the air and told the audience that the Munich Putsch was taking place and the National Revolution had begun.

Leaving Hermann Goering and the SA to guard the 3,000 officials, Hitler took Gustav von Kahr, Otto von Lossow, the commander of the Bavarian Army and Hans von Lossow, the commandant of the Bavarian State Police into an adjoining room. Hitler told the men that he was to be the new leader of Germany and offered them posts in his new government. Aware that this would be an act of high treason, the three men were initially reluctant to agree to this offer. Adolf Hitler was furious and threatened to shoot them and then commit suicide: "I have three bullets for you, gentlemen, and one for me!" After this the three men agreed.

Soon afterwards Eric Ludendorff arrived. Ludendorff had been leader of the German Army at the end of the First World War. He had therefore found Hitler's claim that the war had not been lost by the army but by Jews, Socialists, Communists and the German government, attractive, and was a strong supporter of the Nazi Party. Ludendorff agreed to become head of the German Army in Hitler's government.

While Adolf Hitler had been appointing government ministers, Ernst Rohm, leading a group of stormtroopers, had seized the War Ministry and Rudolf Hess was arranging the arrest of Jews and left-wing political leaders in Bavaria. Adolf Hitler now planned to march on Berlin and remove the national government. Surprisingly, Hitler had not arranged for the stormtroopers to take control of the radio stations and the telegraph offices. This meant that the national government in Berlin soon heard about Hitler's putsch and gave orders for it to be crushed.

The next day Adolf Hitler, Eric Ludendorff, Hermann Goering and 3,000 armed supporters of the Nazi Party marched through Munich in an attempt to join up with Rohm's forces at the War Ministry. At Odeonsplatz they found the road blocked by the Munich police. As they refused to stop, the police fired into the ground in front of the marchers. The stormtroopers returned the fire and during the next few minutes 21 people were killed and another hundred were wounded, including Goering.

When the firing started Adolf Hitler threw himself to the ground dislocating his shoulder. Hitler lost his nerve and ran to a nearby car. Although the police were outnumbered, the Nazis followed their leader's example and ran away. Only Eric Ludendorff and his adjutant continued walking towards the police. Later Nazi historians were to claim that the reason Hitler left the scene so quickly was because he had to rush an injured young boy to the local hospital.

After hiding in a friend's house for several days, Adolf Hitler gave himself in and was arrested.

Hitler speech in Munich, September 1930



If today our action employs among its different weapons that of Parliament, that is not to say that parliamentary parties exist only for parliamentary ends. For us Parliament is not an end in itself, but merely a means to an end . . . we are not on principle a parliamentary party - that would be a contradiction of our whole outlook - WE ARE A PARLIAMENTARY PARTY BY COMPULSION, UNDER CONSTRAINT, AND THAT COMPULSION IS THE CONSTITUTION. The Constitution compels us to use this means. It does not compel us to wish for a particular goal, it only prescribes a way - a method, and, I repeat, we follow this way legally, in accordance with the Constitution: by the way laid down through the Constitution we advance towards the purposes which we have set before us.

Never can Constitutions determine for all time the content of a purpose, especially when this content is not identical with the vital rights of a people. If today the Constitution admits for its protection laws which are headed, 'Laws for the Protection of the Republic,' then it is demonstrated that the most which our present Constitution can prescribe is nothing but the protection and the maintenance of a form, and that does not touch the maintenance of the nation, of a people. This purpose is therefore free: this is the goal which we proclaim and to which we shall attain. . .

From blood, authority of personality, and a fighting spirit springs that value which alone entitles a people to look around with glad hope, and that alone is also the condition for the life which men then desire. And when that is realized, then that too is realized for which today the political parties strive: prosperity, happiness of the individual, family-life, etc. First will come honor and then freedom, and from both of these happiness, prosperity, life: in a word, that state of things will return which we Germans perhaps dimly saw before the War, when individuals can once more live with joy in their hearts because life has a meaning and a purpose, because the close of life is then not in itself the end, since there will be an endless chain of generations to follow: man will know that what we create will not sink into Orcus but will pass to his children and to his children's children. And so this victory which we have just won is nothing else than the winning of a new weapon for our fight.... IT IS NOT FOR SEATS IN PARLIAMENT THAT WE FIGHT, BUT WE WIN SEATS IN PARLIAMENT IN ORDER THAT ONE DAY WE MAY BE ABLE TO LIBERATE THE GERMAN PEOPLE....

Do not write on your banners the word 'Victory': today that word shall be uttered for the last time. Strike through the word 'Victory' and write once more in its place the word which suits us better - the word 'Fight.'

Hitler's Trial:



The judges in this sensational trial were chosen by a Nazi sympathizer in the Bavarian government. The main judge, Georg Neithardt, was the same judge that had sat at Hitler's previous trial in 1922 for violently breaking up a meeting. Neithardt had reduced the charge to breach of peace and, despite the minimum sentence being 3 months in prison, only fined Hitler and his fellow Nazis.

During this trial, they allowed Hitler to use the courtroom as a propaganda platform from which he could speak at any length on his own behalf, interrupt others at any time and even cross examine witnesses.

Rather than deny the charges, Hitler admitted wanting to overthrow the government and outlined his reasons, portraying himself as a German patriot and the democratic government itself, its founders and leaders, as the real criminals.

"I alone bear the responsibility. But I am not a criminal because of that. If today I stand here as a revolutionary, it is as a revolutionary against the revolution. There is no such thing as high treason against the traitors of 1918."

Newspapers quoted Hitler at length. For the first time, the German people as a whole had a chance to get acquainted with this man and his thinking. And many liked what they heard.

During 24 days of long, rambling arguments, Hitler's daring grew. As the trial concluded, sensing the national impact he was having, Hitler gave this closing statement:

"The man who is born to be a dictator is not compelled. He wills it. He is not driven forward, but drives himself. There is nothing immodest about this. Is it immodest for a worker to drive himself toward heavy labour? Is it presumptuous of a man with the high forehead of a thinker to ponder through the nights till he gives the world an invention? The man who feels called upon to govern a people has no right to say, 'If you want me or summon me, I will cooperate.' No! It is his duty to step forward. The army which we have now formed is growing day to day. I nourish the proud hope that one day the hour will come when these rough companies will grow to battalions, the battalions to regiments, the regiments to divisions, that the old cockade will be taken from the mud, that the old flags will wave again, that that there will be a reconciliation at the last great divine judgment which we are prepared to face. For it is not you, gentlemen, who pass judgment on us. That judgment is spoken by the eternal court of history...Pronounce us guilty a thousand times over: the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to pieces the State Prosecutor's submissions and the court's verdict; for she acquits us."

The court's verdict - guilty. Possible sentence - life. Hitler's sentence - five years, eligible for parole in six months.

The three judges in the trial had become so sympathetic that the presiding judge had to persuade them to find him guilty at all. They agreed to find Hitler guilty only after being assured he would get early parole.

Other Nazi leaders arrested after the failed Putsch got light sentences as well. General Ludendorff was even acquitted.