

Communist revolution, then this is not due to you or people like you, but due to men who recognized and eliminated the danger while you babbled your parlor Bolshevism."

If I am further accused of having the Reichstag fire set to gain a pretext to proceed against the Communists, I must reject this charge as grotesque and ridiculous. To proceed against Communism no special grounds were required. Their record of guilt was already so great, their crimes so immense, that in any case I was determined and ready to begin the ruthless war of extermination against this plague with all means at my disposal. On the contrary, as I already testified at the Reichstag fire trial, the fire, which forced me to act rapidly, was extremely inconvenient to me, as it forced me to act sooner than I had intended and to strike before I had completed all of my necessary preparations. I have no doubt whatsoever that the ideological originator and initiator of the fire was the Communist Party and that there must have been several perpetrators, of whom probably the stupidest and least competent one was captured. But it is not the incendiaries who were the crucial actors here, but rather their ideological progenitors, the ones who secretly pulled the strings; they are the true culprits and destroyers of the German people and their culture.

Source: Hermann Goering, *Aufbau einer Nation* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1934), pp. 83-9. Translated by Rod Stackelberg

### The "Day of Potsdam"

On 21 March 1933, the first day of spring, the new Hitler government staged an elaborate ceremony in Potsdam, the traditional residence of the Prussian kings. The ceremony was intended to symbolize the continuity between Prusso-German monarchism and the new Nazi-led regime. In the venerable Garrison Church, in front of the vault of Frederick the Great and the throne traditionally occupied by the kaiser, President Hindenburg called on the new government to overcome the selfishness and partisan divisions of the Weimar era and to lead the national renewal for a unified, free, and proud Germany. Hitler, in turn, extolled Hindenburg as the patron of the German "awakening" and as the symbol of the indestructible vitality of the German nation. In his diary (which was not published until 1959 and may therefore have been subjected to some later revision) the conservative German writer Erich Ebermayer captured the triumphalist mood of the day, but also the foreboding of isolated dissidents.

#### 3.7 Erich Ebermayer, diary entry on the "Day of Potsdam," 21 March 1933

In the morning, broadcast of the ceremony in Potsdam on the radio. Everything is smooth, impressive, even exciting, at least for the masses. But we cannot and must not close our eyes either to what's happening here. Here today the marriage was successful, if not forever, then at least for a while, between the masses led by Hitler and the "spirit of Potsdam," the Prussian tradition, represented by Hindenburg.

What magnificent staging by the master director Goebbels! Hindenburg, the cabinet, and members of parliament ride from Berlin to Potsdam through a single, solid line of cheering millions. All of Berlin seems to be in the streets. The cabinet and members of parliament walk from the Nikolai Church to the Garrison Church. Bells pealing and cannons firing.

Hindenburg and Hitler enter the Garrison Church together. The radio announcer is moved almost to tears.

Then Hindenburg reads out his message. Simple, powerful, coming from an unpretentious soul and therefore likely to appeal to unpretentious souls. Merely the fact that here is a man who unites generations of German history, who fought in 1866, who was present at the crowning of the kaiser in 1871 in Versailles, who rose up to become a national hero from 1914 to 1918; whose popularity among our peculiar people was diminished neither by lost battles nor the lost world war; whom, on the contrary, the defeat actually raised to mythical transfiguration; who then as an old man once again and finally a second time took over the leadership of the empire, not out of vanity or lust for power, but without a doubt out of a Prussian sense of duty – he has achieved now, shortly before his death, the marriage of his world with the newly ascendant world represented by the Austrian corporal Hitler.

Then Hitler speaks. It cannot be denied: he has grown. Surprisingly for his opponents, the demagogue and party leader, the fanatic and rabble-rouser seems to be developing into a real statesman. So he is a genius after all, in whose enigmatic soul there are unsuspected and unprecedented possibilities? The government declaration stands out in its striking moderation. Not a word of hatred against opponents, not a word of racial ideology, no threats directed inside or outside of the country. Hitler only speaks about what they want. Preservation of the great tradition of our nation, stability of the government instead of constant vacillation, taking into consideration all the experiences in the life of the individual and the community that have proven to be useful for the well-being of the people throughout the millennia.

Hindenburg lays wreaths on the graves of the Prussian kings. The aged Field Marshal offers his hand to his corporal from the World War. The corporal bows low over the Field Marshal's hand. Canons thunder over Potsdam – over Germany.

No one can escape the emotion. Father is deeply impressed as well. Mother has tears in her eyes.

I silently leave the room, then the house, and go out into the woods. I must be alone.

In the evening a quiet hour with M. He is completely unmoved by the events of the day, as if enwrapped in a thick protective skin. He thinks it is all merely a rigged act; he does not for a moment waver in his instinctive aversion. "You'll see what will happen!" says the twenty-one year old.

I say nothing, ashamed and distressed.

Source: Erich Ebermayer, *Denn heute gehört uns Deutschland: Persönliches und politisches Tagebuch* (Hamburg and Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1959), pp. 45-7. Translated by Sally Winkle

### The Enabling Act

The so-called Enabling Act formed the legal basis of Hitler's dictatorship. The law that abrogated the Weimar constitution and destroyed parliamentary democracy in Germany was given a typically euphemistic title. The necessary two-thirds majority required to change the constitution was achieved by barring elected Communist delegates from taking their seats in the Reichstag and by persuading the Catholic Center Party to support the law. There was some precedent for such a law as both the German People's

Party leader Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929) and his successor as chancellor, the Center Party leader Wilhelm Marx (1863–1946), had succeeded in gaining temporary legislative powers for their cabinets, though in more restricted form, in the Ruhr Crisis in 1923. The Enabling Act gave Hitler dictatorial powers for a period of four years and freed him from dependence not only on the Reichstag but also on the President, whose approval was needed for all legislation passed by decree under Article 48 of the Weimar constitution (Doc. 2.5). The Enabling Act was twice renewed by what had by then become a rubber-stamp Reichstag, and was extended indefinitely by Hitler's decree in 1941.

The Enabling Act passed by a vote of 444 to 94. Only the SPD voted against the law, despite intimidation and threats of retaliation by the Nazis. In negotiations preceding the passage of the law, Hitler made several concessions to gain the support of the Catholic Center, including a pledge to respect the continued existence of the constituent states, the Reichstag, an independent judiciary, and the presidency. Most importantly, Hitler pledged to respect the independence of the Church in Germany. His promise to negotiate a Concordat with the Vatican, a goal of Vatican policy since the 1920s, may have persuaded the Church hierarchy not to oppose the Enabling Act. Hitler's threat to declare a national emergency and rule without legal authorization may also have influenced the Center Party's fateful decision to support the Enabling Act.

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### 3.8 Law to Remove the Distress of People and State, 24 March 1933

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The Reichstag has resolved upon the following law which is promulgated herewith with approval of the Reichsrat [the council representing the individual states of the Reich] after it has been established that all the requirements of legislation for changing the constitution have been complied with.

#### ARTICLE 1

Laws for the Reich can be enacted by the Reich Cabinet as well as in accordance with the procedure provided by the Constitution of the Reich. This applies also to the laws referred to in article 85, paragraph 2, and in article 87 of the Constitution.

#### ARTICLE 2

The national laws enacted by the Reich Cabinet may deviate from the Constitution insofar as they do not affect the institution of the Reichstag or the Reichsrat as such. The powers of the Reich President will remain intact.

#### ARTICLE 3

The laws for the Reich enacted by the Reich Cabinet are issued by the Reich Chancellor and published in the *Reichsgesetzblatt*. They come into effect, unless otherwise specified, on the day following their publication. Articles 68 to 77 of the Constitution do not apply to the laws enacted by the Reich Cabinet.

#### ARTICLE 4

Treaties of the Reich with foreign countries relating to matters of national legislation do not require the approval of the bodies participating in the legislation. The Reich Cabinet is empowered to issue the necessary provisions for the execution of these treaties.

#### ARTICLE 5

This law will become effective on the day of its promulgation. It becomes invalid on 1 April 1937. Moreover it becomes invalid if the present Reich government should be replaced by another.  
Berlin, 24 March 1933

The Reich President: von Hindenburg  
The Reich Chancellor: Adolf Hitler  
The Reich Minister of the Interior: Frick  
The Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs: Freiherr von Neurath  
The Reich Minister of Finance: Count Schwerin von Krosigk

Source: *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1933, I, p. 141

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### Persecution of the Jews

The widespread random attacks on Jews by SA and Nazi party members that accompanied the Nazi assumption of power resulted in adverse publicity, criticism by foreign governments, and efforts to organize boycotts of German imports to Britain, the US, and other countries. Under the pretext of punishing Jews for "atrocious propaganda," but in reality to provide a controlled outlet for party militants who wanted to force Jews out of Germany through violent action, the Nazi leadership called a one-day boycott of all Jewish enterprises on 1 April 1933. The SA was under orders not to enter the premises of Jewish businesses, however, or to destroy property. The direction of this action was entrusted to a "Committee for the Defense Against Jewish Atrocities and Boycott Propaganda" under the thuggish Julius Streicher (1885–1946), Gauleiter of Franconia and publisher of the anti-Semitic tabloid *Der Stürmer*. Streicher's public proclamation of the boycott held German Jews accountable for any boycott activity abroad. For a number of reasons the official boycott lasted only one day. The Nazis feared the chaotic consequences that might result from a sudden extrusion of Jews from German economic life. Industrial leaders also feared foreign retaliation against German exports. Public compliance with the boycott was sporadic at best. Unofficially, however, boycotts continued on the local level, and SA and party members were prohibited from patronizing Jewish businesses.

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### 3.9 Julius Streicher, Appeal for the boycott of all Jewish enterprises, 31 March 1933

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German national comrades! The ones who are guilty of this insane crime, this malicious atrocity of propaganda and incitement to boycott, are the Jews in Germany. They have called on their racial