

ties of power would moderate the Nazis' aims and methods. A majority of Germans supported Hitler's call for unity and shared his goals of restoring the German economy, reviving Germany's military power, and raising Germany's standing in the world. Most Germans also agreed with his assessment that communists were mainly responsible for the terrible rifts in German society. The government's proclamation helped to prepare the public for the elimination of a parliamentary system that a growing number of Germans regarded as too permissive, divisive, and ineffective. Although the Nazis themselves did not command an electoral majority, there was a growing consensus for a more unified and authoritarian form of government than the failed Weimar system.

### 3.1 Proclamation of the Reich Government to the German People, 1 February 1933

More than fourteen years have passed since that ill-fated day when, deluded by promises at home and abroad, the German *Volk* forgot the most treasured values of our past, the Reich, its honor and its freedom, and thus lost everything. Since those days of betrayal, the Almighty has withheld his blessing from our *Volk*. Dissension and hatred broke out among us. Millions of the best German men and women from all walks of life watched in profound distress as the unity of the nation disintegrated and dissolved in a tangle of egotistical political opinions, economic interests, and ideological differences. As so often in our history, the portrait of Germany has been one of heartbreaking disunity since this day of revolution. We did not receive the equality and fraternity promised to us, but we did lose our liberty. For the disintegration of the unity of spirit and will of our *Volk* internally was followed by the decline of its political standing in the world ...

The insane notion of victor and vanquished has destroyed the trust between nations and thereby also the world economy. But the misery of our *Volk* is dreadful! The misery of millions of unemployed, starving proletarians in industry is being followed by the impoverishment of the entire *Mittelstand* and artisan vocations.<sup>1</sup> If this disintegration ultimately also engulfs the German peasants, we will be confronted by a catastrophe of incalculable dimensions. For not only will this mean the end of a Reich, but also of a two-thousand-year-old inheritance of the highest and loftiest values of human culture and civilization. The signs of disintegration are all around us. With unprecedented will and violence, Communists attempt with insane methods to poison and demoralize the shaken and uprooted *Volk* ...

Fourteen years of Marxism have ruined Germany. One year of Bolshevism would destroy Germany. The presently richest and most beautiful cultural areas of the world would be turned into chaos and a heap of ruins. Even the suffering of the last decade and a half would not compare with the misery of a Europe in whose heart the red flag of destruction had been raised. May the thousands of wounded and countless dead that this internal war has already cost serve as a warning signal against the coming storm. In these hours of overwhelming concern for the existence and future of the German nation, the aged leader of the World War appealed to us men in the national parties and organizations to fight under him once more as we had at the front, this time at home, in unity and loyalty, for the salvation of the

<sup>1</sup> *Mittelstand* is the German designation for the lower middle class of small proprietors, shopkeepers, and tradesmen who, along with small-scale farmers ("peasants"), formed a high proportion of the Nazis' electoral constituency.

Reich. As the venerable Reich President has extended his hand to us to work together, we, the national leaders, vow to God, our conscience, and our *Volk* that we shall resolutely and steadfastly fulfill the task thus entrusted to us as the national government.

The situation we have inherited is a terrible one. The task we must fulfill is the most difficult one posed to German statesmen within living memory. But our confidence is unbounded, for we believe in our people and their imperishable values. Peasants, workers, and the middle classes must all join together to provide the building blocks for the new Reich. The national government regards as its first and foremost task to restore the unity of spirit and will of our *Volk*. It will preserve and defend the foundation upon which the strength of our nation rests. It will extend its firm protection to Christianity as the basis of our moral system, and to the family as the nucleus of our *Volk* and state. It will restore to our *Volk*, beyond the divisions of rank and class, its consciousness of national and political unity and the duties this entails. It will make reverence for our great past and pride in our ancient traditions the foundation for the education of German youth. In this way it will declare a merciless war against spiritual, political, and cultural nihilism. Germany must not and will not sink into anarchistic communism. In place of turbulent instincts it will again raise national discipline to the guiding principle of our life. In doing so, the government will devote careful attention to those institutions that constitute the true guarantors of the power and strength of our nation ...

If Germany is to experience this political and economic revival and conscientiously fulfill its obligations towards other nations, one decisive step is required: overcoming the Communist subversion of Germany. We, the men of this government, feel ourselves responsible to German history for the reconstruction of an orderly body-politic and thus for finally overcoming the insanity of class and class conflict. It is not a single class that we envision, but rather the German *Volk*, its millions of peasants, bourgeois, and workers, who will either together overcome the problems of these times or succumb to them together. Full of resolve and true to our oath, we are determined – in view of the present Reichstag's inability to support this work – to entrust this task, to which we are committed, to the German *Volk* itself.

Reich President Field Marshal von Hindenburg has summoned us with the order to give our nation the opportunity to regain its strength through unity. We therefore now appeal to the German people to take part in this act of reconciliation. The government of the national resurgence wants to work, and it will work. It was not responsible for leading the German nation into ruin for fourteen years, but it wants to lead the nation back to the top. It is determined to make good in four years the damage done in fourteen years. But it cannot make the work of reconstruction dependent upon the approval of those who are to blame for the collapse. The Marxist parties and their fellow travellers have had fourteen years to prove their ability. The result is a heap of rubble. Now, German people, give us four years, and then pass judgment on us! True to the order of the Field Marshal, let us begin. May almighty God look mercifully upon our work, lead our will on the right path, bless us with insight, and reward us with the trust of our people. For we are not fighting for ourselves, but for Germany!

Adolf Hitler; v. Papen; Baron v. Neurath; Dr. Frick;  
Count Schwerin v. Krosigk; Dr. Hugenberg; Seldte;  
Dr. Gürtner; v. Blomberg; Eltz v. Rübénach; Göring; Dr. Gereke

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