



HERMANN GOERING

Hitler Unmasked

By KURT G. W. LUDECKE
(Adapted from the book "I Knew Hitler."
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Hitler and others of original Nazi party march through Munich streets, celebrating anniversary of Beer Hall putsch.

Blackmail, Gang Style!

● Adolf Hitler has effective ways of disposing of any rivals. When the author of "I Knew Hitler" sought redress from Nazis who had slandered him the litigation promised to touch a hot zone of Nazism and greatly to embarrass Hitler and several of his aids. When Ludecke declined to abandon his claims Hitler in turn abandoned him. Soon Ludecke was in jail as Hitler's prisoner. There he met another prisoner who had dared defy the Fuehrer.

● "This was Capt. Arthur Mahraun, the founder and leader of the once powerful Jung Deutsche Orden," Ludecke writes. "I spent six days with him, wondering how his personality could have inspired an organized following of more than a half million youths. And yet he is one who should have been treated generously instead of being driven to lifelong bitterness."

● "Obviously I cannot relate all Mahraun told me, for he is still alive in Germany. But out of my own observation I can affirm that he had been terribly and inhumanly treated. Morose and wrathful, he would brood for hours, his bruised head cupped in his hands, and then write frantically in his notebook. He had gone through the hands of the Feldpolizei, the most dreaded group of all, at the General Papen strasse. The men had jumped on him with their boots, grinding their heels into his kidneys."

● "There was no case against Mahraun. They wanted him to transfer ownership of his publishing company, and he had refused. During my stay with him he was called out several times to confer with Nazi emissaries. Finally in September he gave up, signed away his property, and was set at liberty."

● "Sheer blackmail, in gangster fashion! This man was merely a political opponent, once an active officer of the army, a wounded veteran, and a knight of the Hohenzollern order for distinguished bravery under fire—the highest order the emperor could bestow except the pour le merite. This in the face of the new government's loud proclamation of how it would treat war veterans. To be sure, veterans got free second-class passage on trains—but they also were beaten to a bloody pulp if they failed to fall in line."

I.
D ID HISTORY wear the mask of tragedy or comedy on that night of Nov. 8, 1923?

The eventful evening of the struggle found the Burgerbraukeller in the outer part of Munich the scene of a great mass-meeting. Dr. Von Kahr was to have the platform.

Everybody who was anybody was there—well known nationalists and Rightist politicians from all parts of Germany; high dignitaries, officers, and civilians with great names. Almost the entire Bavarian cabinet attended. Hitler was merely one of the many special guests.

All eyes were on Kahr when he rose on the tribune to speak. Could he really be a dictator, a second Bismarck—this swarthy, little man, square head stooped between awkward shoulders, an old-fashioned double-breasted morning coat reaching almost to his knees, who had revealed thus far more the mentality of a cunning peasant than the breadth of a statesman?

No—he was no dictator; he was the state commissioner with dictatorial powers, conferred on him out of political necessity by the Bavarian Peo-

The Dreamer Who Became Ruthless Dictator

● By November, 1923, currency inflation had reached nightmare proportions in Germany. Simultaneously the Nazi movement and the Kampfbund were growing at a feverish tempo. Many of those flocking to Hitler were mere opportunists, bandwagon jumpers. Then, with financial panic raging, Hitler's hand was forced. Dr. Gustav von Kahr, Bavarian prime minister, called a meeting of the elite of all nationalists for Nov. 8. His plan, Hitler learned, was to prepare the ground at that time for a coup to be staged on Nov. 12 restoring the deposed Wittelsbach monarchy to Bavaria. Restoration would annihilate Hitler's plan for a national government, and he determined to act.

ple's party because of their fear of Hitler.

Dead silence reigned in the hall. Every one was on the quiver to hear a decisive pronouncement.

None ever came. Hitler was standing with Rosenberg near the entrance, looking not at Kahr but at a watch in his hand. With unbearable precision, the minute hand advanced.

8:27—8:28—8:29—eight-thirty!

The door was flung open; steel helmeted men burst through, pushing Maxim guns into the hall. Other steel helmets appeared menacingly at every window. Hitler snapped

the watch back into his pocket, seized his revolver, and elbowed his way forward through the crowd behind his bodyguard.

The hall was thrown into the wildest commotion. Only a few

"For added strength the Nazi S. A. (Sturmabteilung, or 'storm troopers') had been allied with the Gie-Korps Oberland, the Frei-Korps Rossbach, and the Reichsflagge as the Kampfbund under the military leadership of Colonel Kriebel, a member of the Nazi party, but with Hitler acting as its sovereign political leader. This semi-military organization was Hitler's fighting force which after the hoped-for overthrow of the Bavarian government was to serve as the nucleus of the people's army for the contemplated 'march on Berlin.' But the fiasco of the Beer Hall putsch on Nov. 8 and 9, 1923, foiled the scheme, and the Kampfbund as well as the Nazi party were dissolved by state decree. (One literal translation of Kampfbund is 'fighting league'.")

of the audience realized the significance of this extraordinary disturbance. Within a few seconds no one could be heard above the uproar.

Kahr, too shaken to speak even if he could have been heard, stared aghast as Hitler jumped up on a table and fired two shots into the ceiling, demanding quiet. In an instant the stillness was absolute; one could even hear Hitler breathing hard.

Then he leaped to the tribune, gesturing Kahr aside, and shouted to the audience:

"The national revolution has begun. Six hundred armed men are covering the hall!"—though in reality there were only sixty. "No one may leave. The barracks of the Reichswehr and of the police are occupied; the Reichswehr and the police have joined the Hakenkreuz flag. The Bavarian government is deposed. The Reich government is deposed. The new Reich government—Hitler-Ludendorff-Poehner—Hoch!"

It was not true, but it worked.

While the minister-president and the other ministers were taken into custody by Shock Troopers, Hitler beckoned Kahr, Commander Seisser of the police, and Gen. Lossow of the Reichswehr to follow him into a nearby room. There he and Poehner implored them to join the revolution. The rescue of Bavaria alone was too small a goal, Hitler told them. Bavaria must be preserved as part of the Reich and used as a springboard for the national revolution. Kahr and Poehner should control Bavaria with dictatorial powers—but for this purpose alone. He himself would head the Reich government; Ludendorff would take over the Reichswehr, with Lossow as war minister and Seisser as minister of police.

The trio were trapped. Not knowing how things really stood, they hesitated and tried to gain time. Hitler, now almost beside himself with excitement, drew his gun, saying that he had four bullets left; three for them and one for himself—if they refused to support him.

At this moment Ludendorff entered with Dr. Max von Scheubner-Richter, political adviser to the Kampfbund. But alas, the general had left off his uniform and his medals! When Scheubner-Richter had called at Ludendorff's home that evening to tell him for the first time what was under way and to summon him in the name of Germany, the great soldier simply took up his hat and hastened to Munich in the morning coat he happened to be wearing.

Nevertheless, Ludendorff's entrance ended the impasse.

"Your excellency's wishes are my orders," said Von Lossow. Next Seisser agreed to serve.

Then Kahr, unable to hesitate any longer, also accepted, and they all returned to the hall, where Goering had been talking against time to the dumfounded crowd. Hitler replaced him. Repeating that the government in Berlin was now deposed, and announcing the names and offices of the new government heads, he finished his short speech with:

"Tomorrow Germany will see a national government—or us dead!"

But there had been one little incident which probably set in motion the machinery for Hitler's undoing. At the moment when Hitler jumped on the table, Gen. Von Lossow's adjutant, using the authority of his full uniform, duped the Nazi guards at the door and slipped unobserved out of the hall.

The Kampfbund had gathered that evening in another hall,

unaware that what was ostensibly just another meeting was really a mobilization. When eight-thirty came Capt. Roehm informed the ranks that the national revolution had begun. Delirious with joy at the prospect of action, the men left for the posts assigned them.

Roehm, with his Reichskriegsflagge, took possession of the war ministry, only half a block from the Ludwigsstrasse, the chief avenue of Munich. The main body of the S. A. and the Oberland marched through a cheering town to the Burgerbraukeller, where the Kampfbund established headquarters.

II.

So far, all had been as orderly as a revolution can be; but now confusion began to raise obstacles. Oberleutnant Gerhard Rossbach, under orders to occupy government buildings, met with resistance. The police parried his demands by pretending that, since they all were united now under the new government, surrender was not necessary. At that, Rossbach's men encamped in the streets, machine guns mounted.

Among other things, the general plan called for the occupation of the engineers' barracks, where some three hundred Oberland men had expected to receive their arms. But they found the doors closed against them: the regular commander of the engineers, a Nazi sympathizer, had been replaced by an officer who refused to yield.

Now Hitler made a crucial error. After all, the arming of a few hundred men was a minor matter at such a moment. Solidarity and unity were more important, and above all action—but in another direction. Hitler should have known that Kahr, Lossow, and Seisser would not be reliable, for they had pledged allegiance at the point of a gun.

Col. Kriebel, commander of the Kampfbund, had already sent a competent officer to adjust matters at the engineers' barracks. Obviously this was not Hitler's business; his place was at the nerve center of the putsch. Yet Hitler—originator and only coordinator of the whole plot—left the vital post of supreme command and ran off on the same trifling errand. And while he was failing to settle the matter he failed at the same time to keep his new "colleagues" under his thumb.

With the leader no longer in evidence, the other members of the new "government" remained in conference for a while. Kahr announced that the proper authorities had been informed of the change in government, and asked Poehner to give the news to the press. That was as far as their concerted statesmanship managed to go. Then these gentlemen—Ludendorff, Poehner, Kahr, Seisser, and Lossow—parted.

Ludendorff drove to the war ministry. Lossow went to the Stadtkommandantur. Kahr and Seisser drifted off. God knows where. And Poehner, the new Bavarian minister-president, went home to bed.

History shows no revolutions which have been won between the sheets—and this one was not to be the exception.

When Capt. Roehm tried to get in touch with Gen. von Lossow in the Stadtkommandantur he was not admitted, and became suspicious. Not so Ludendorff. When one of his officers intimated that all might not be above-board in Lossow's direc-

tion, the great Feldherr frowned and made a characteristic reply:

"A German general does not break his word!"

Finally, in the early morning, Ludendorff and Kriebel joined Hitler at the Burgerbraukeller.

A hundred plans were discussed and discarded. Finally Ludendorff's advice prevailed, and it was decided to march into Munich. Counting on a huge popular demonstration in their favor, they hoped that with tens of thousands of burghers marching behind them through the heart of the city the Reichswehr and police would refuse to fire. Streicher, Esser, and other speakers were sent out to whip up the populace to a favorable response.

In the hour before noon on the 9th of November, about seven thousand men of the Kampfbund, in files eight abreast

with their rifles slung across their backs to proclaim their peaceful intention, marched over the Isar bridge into the inner city, followed by thousands of Nazis and their sympathizers.

Dense cordons of police on the other side of the river were quickly disarmed; some of them even threw away their rifles as they saw Ludendorff and Hitler approach. An ever-increasing number of cheering people joined the procession, which wound its way unmolested to the Marienplatz, where most of Munich's citizens had already assembled.

From here a veritable human flood poured down the street toward the Odeonsplatz. Ahead was the Ludwigsstrasse, blocked by Reichswehr. The flood advanced. In its front rank marched Hitler, Ludendorff, and other leaders, directly behind Streicher and a color bearer with the Hakenkreuz banner.

Suddenly, only a few yards away, Landespolizei—the Bavarian state police—rushed forward from their place of concealment behind the Feldherrnhalle, leveled their carbines, and took aim.

A cold-blooded officer, Freiherr von Godin, ordered his platoon to fire on the Nazis. He repeated the order twice, then tore a rifle from the hands of a reluctant soldier. Streicher then screamed:

"Ludendorff—don't shoot your general! Hitler and Ludendorff! . . . Hitler and Ludendorff! . . ."

It was too late. A volley rent

the air, killing fourteen men in the Nazi ranks.

Ludendorff, erect and unhurt, marched straight ahead and was arrested. Hitler, who had been at Ludendorff's side, walking arm-in-arm with Scheubner-Richter, was dragged to the ground with a dislocated shoulder when the doctor crumpled under the hail of lead. Hitler's bodyguard threw himself on his master, covering him with his body. He received eleven bullets. Beside him Kurt Neubauer, Ludendorff's faithful valet, who had sprung in front of the general to protect him, lay dead with the upper part of his head ripped away.

The revolution was finished. Hitler had been helped to his car and had escaped into the mountains.

When the pain in his shoulder grew unbearable and the gasoline was all but gone, he remembered that they were near Uffing, where Hanfstaengl had a country house. By chance Erna Hanfstaengl, Putzi's sister, was at home to admit him. A persistent rumor says that she saved Hitler from suicide in this bitter hour. When, years later, I asked him about it, he answered with great simplicity:

"No, that is not true; she did not save me from suicide. Naturally my spirits were very low—the mere presence of a woman may have kept me from the thought of ending my life." It was there, on Nov. 11, that Hitler was arrested.

III.
During a stop-over at Innsbruck, while Capt. Hermann Goering was telling me his move by move story of the putsch, I had a chance to size up the man himself.

It troubled my conscience a little that I had helped the party to capture one rather dubious ornament in Hanfstaengl.

Goering had served with us even less time than Hanfstaengl, some ten months all told, and I had met him only once before leaving Munich. Yet from the first he had held a position of real influence; so my curiosity regarding him was keen.

At Innsbruck I learned—from his own lips and at great length—that the eminent captain had received a light bullet wound during the demonstration on Nov. 9 when fourteen Nazis were killed. He was discharged from the hospital the day after my arrival, however.

Frau Goering, born Baroness Karin von Fock of the Swedish nobility, was a charming woman, quiet and sympathetic, who walked with a particularly handsome and free carriage. Goer-

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