CHAPTER THREE

THE YEARS OF WAITING

1924–31

I

FIFTY miles west of Munich in the wooded valley of the Lech lies the small town of Landsberg. It was here that Hitler served his term of imprisonment from 11 November 1923 to 20 December 1924, with only the interlude of the trial in Munich to interrupt it. In the early summer of 1924 some forty other National Socialists were in prison with him, and they had an easy and comfortable life. They ate well – Hitler became quite fat in prison – had as many visitors as they wished, and spent much of their time out of doors in the garden, where, like the rest, Hitler habitually wore leather shorts with a Tyrolean jacket. Emil Maurice acted partly as Hitler's batman, partly as his secretary, a job which he later relinquished to Rudolf Hess, who had voluntarily returned from Austria to share his leader's imprisonment. Hitler's large and sunny room, No. 7, was on the first floor, a mark of privilege which he shared with Weber, Kriebel, and Hess. On his thirty-fifth birthday, which fell shortly after the trial, the parcels and flowers he received filled several rooms. He had a large correspondence in addition to his visitors, and as many newspapers and books as he wished. Hitler presided at the midday meal, claiming and receiving the respect due to him as leader of the Party: much of the time, however, from July onwards he shut himself up in his room to dictate *Mein Kampf*, which was begun in prison and taken down by Emil Maurice and Hess.

Max Amann, who was to publish the book, had originally hoped for an account, full of sensational revelations, of the November putsch. But Hitler was too canny for that; there were to be no recriminations. His own title for the book was *Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice*, reduced by Amann to *Mein Kampf – My Struggle*. Even then Amann was to be disappointed. For the book contains very little autobiography, but is filled with page after page of turgid discussion of Hitler's ideas, written in a verbose style which is both difficult and dull to read.

Hitler took the writing of *Mein Kampf* with great seriousness. Dietrich Eckart, Feder, and Rosenberg had all published books or pamphlets, and Hitler was anxious to establish his own position of intellectual as well as political authority in the Party. He was eager to prove that he too, even though he had never been to a university and had left school without a certificate, had read and thought deeply, acquiring his own *Weltanschauung*. It is this thwarted intellectual ambition, the desire to make people take him seriously as an original thinker, which accounts for the pretentiousness of the style, the use of long words and constant repetitions, all the tricks of a half-educated man seeking to give weight to his words. As a result *Mein Kampf* is a remarkably interesting book for anyone trying to understand Hitler's mind, but as a party tract or a political best-seller it was a failure, which few, even among the party members, had the patience to read.

While Hitler turned his energies to writing *Mein Kampf* the Party fell to pieces; 9 November had been followed by the proscription of the Party and its organizations throughout the Reich, the suppression of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and the arrest or flight of the leaders. Göring remained abroad until 1927, Scheubner-Richter had been killed, and Dietrich Eckart, who had been ill for some time, died at the end of 1923. Quarrels soon broke out among those who remained at liberty or were released from prison.

Before his arrest Hitler had managed to send a pencilled note to Rosenberg with the brief message: 'Dear Rosenberg, from now on you will lead the movement.' As Rosenberg himself admits in his memoirs, this was a surprising choice. Although at one time he had great influence on Hitler, Rosenberg was no man of action and had never been one of the small circle who led the conspiracy. As a leader he was ineffective, finding it difficult either to make up his mind or to assert his authority. It was precisely the lack of these qualities which attracted Hitler: Rosenberg as his deputy would represent no danger to his own position in the Party.

Rosenberg, who was not only an intellectual but respectable and prim as well, was soon on the worst terms with the rougher elements in the Party, notably the two rival Jew-baiters and lechers, Julius Streicher and Hermann Esser, who combined to attack every move made by Rosenberg, Gregor Strasser, Ludendorff, and Pöhner, and accused them of undermining Hitler's

position. These in turn retorted by demanding the others' expulsion from the Party and Hitler's repudiation of them. But Hitler declined to take sides: if pushed to decide, he preferred Streicher, Esser, and Amann, however disreputable, because they were loyal to him and dependent on him. Men like Strasser, with ten times the others' abilities, were for that very reason more inclined to follow an independent line.

Political issues of importance were involved in these personal quarrels. What was to be done now that the Party had been dissolved and Hitler was in prison? Hitler's answer, however camouflaged, was simple: Nothing. He had no wish to see the Party revive its fortunes without him. But Gregor Strasser, Röhm, and Rosenberg, supported by Ludendorff, were anxious to take part in the national and State elections of the spring of 1924. Hitler, who was not a German citizen, was automatically excluded, and had from the beginning attacked all parliamentary activity as worthless and dangerous to the independence of the movement. It was true that such tactics were now essential if the Party was to follow the path of legality, but Hitler was concerned with the threat to his personal position as leader of the Party if others were elected to the Reichstag while he remained outside.

Despite Hitler's opposition, loudly echoed by Streicher and Esser, Rosenberg, Strasser, and Ludendorff agreed to cooperate with the other Völkisch[1] groups and won a minor triumph at the April and May elections. The Völkisch bloc became the second largest party in the Bavarian Parliament, while in the Reichstag elections the combined list of the National Socialist German Freedom Movement (N.S. Deutsche Freiheitsbewegung) polled nearly two million votes and captured thirty-two seats. Among those elected were Strasser, Röhm, Ludendorff, Feder, and Frick. Ironically, they owed much of their success to the impression made by Hitler's attitude at the Munich trial, but it was only with great difficulty that Hitler had been persuaded to agree to the election campaign at all.

The combination, under cover of which the proscribed Nazi Party had entered the election campaign, raised another important issue. Ludendorff and Strasser were anxious to consolidate

1. A difficult word to translate: it combines the idea of nationalism with those of race (the *Volk*) and anti-Semitism. The Völkisch groups constituted an extremist wing of the German Nationalists of whose middle-class 'moderation' they were often critical.

and extend the electoral alliance they had concluded with the North German Deutsch-völkische Freiheitspartei led by Albrecht von Graefe and Graf Ernst zu Reventlow, with nationalist, racist, and anti-Semitic views similar to those of the Nazis in the south. In August 1924, a congress of all the Völkisch groups was held at Weimar. In Part I of *Mein Kampf* (written in the years 1924–5) Hitler expressed his dislike of such alliances. 'It is quite erroneous to believe that the strength of a movement must increase if it be combined with other movements of a similar kind. . . . In reality the movement thus admits outside elements which will subsequently weaken its vigour.'[1]

There was some truth in this. The traditional animosity of Prussians and Bavarians; the open hostility of the North Germans to the Roman Catholic Church (whose stronghold was Bavaria), and the opposition of the more bourgeois North German nationalists to the radical and socialist elements in the Nazi programme – all these represented factors which might well weaken the appeal of the Nazis as a Bavarian and South German party. But the root of Hitler's objection was his jealous distrust and fear for his own position. Hitler lacked any ability for co-operation and compromise. The only relationship he understood was that of domination. He preferred a party, however small, over which he could exercise complete and unquestioned control to a combination, however large, in which power must inevitably be shared and his own position reduced to that of equality with other leaders. In Part II of *Mein Kampf* Hitler returns to the question and devotes a whole chapter to it under the title: 'The Strong are Strongest when Alone.'

On the very next page Hitler goes out of his way to praise Julius Streicher, who had magnanimously subordinated his own German Socialists to the Nazi Party, and contrasts his loyalty with the behaviour of those 'ambitious men who at first had no ideas of their own, but felt themselves "called" exactly at that moment in which the success of the N.S.D.A.P. became unquestionable.'[2] There were long and sometimes bitter arguments between Hitler and his visitors at Landsberg on these issues in 1924. Hitler was both suspicious and evasive. He tried by every means to delay decisions until he was released, and once again Streicher and Esser proved their worth to him by founding a rival party, the Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft, in open opposition to Strasser's Völkisch bloc in Bavaria.

1. *Mein Kampf*, p. 293. 2. ibid., p. 243.

A further cause of disagreement was the S.A. Röhm, although found guilty of treason, had been discharged on the day sentence was pronounced. He at once set to work to weld together again the disbanded forces of the Kampfbund. Ludecke was one of those who agreed to help Röhm. 'Many of the men with whom I conferred,' he says, 'were veritable condottieri, such as Captain von Heydebreck and Edmund Heines. Almost without exception they resumed Röhm's work eagerly, only too glad to be busy again at the secret military work without which they found life wearisome.'[1] The Frontbann, as it was now called, grew rapidly, for Röhm was an able organizer and possessed untiring energy: he journeyed from one end of Germany to the other, including Austria and East Prussia, and soon had some thirty thousand men enrolled.

But the greater Röhm's success, the more uneasy Hitler became. His activities threatened Hitler's chances of leaving prison. The Bavarian Government arrested some of the subordinate leaders of the Frontbann, and Hitler's release on parole, which he had expected six months after sentence had been passed, on 1 October 1924, was delayed. 'Hitler, Kriebel, and Weber in their cell,' Röhm wrote later, 'could not realize what was at stake. They felt that their approaching freedom was endangered and laid the blame, not on the enemy, but on the friends who were fighting for them.'[2]

Hitler was no less worried by the character Röhm was giving to the new organization which had replaced and absorbed the old S.A. The two men had never agreed about the function of the Stormtroops. For Hitler the S.A. had first and last a political function: they were to be instruments of political intimidation and propaganda subordinate to the Party. On 15 October, however, Röhm wrote to Ludendorff, as leader of the Völkisch bloc in the Reichstag:

> The political and military movements are entirely independent of each other. . . . As the present leader of the military movement I make the demand that the defence organizations should be given appropriate representation in the parliamentary group and that they should not be hindered in their special work. . . . The National Socialist Movement is a fighting movement. Germany's freedom – both at home and abroad – will never be secured by talk and negotiations; it must be fought for.[3]

1. Ludecke: p. 228.
2. Röhm: *Memoiren* (Saarbrücken, 1934), p. 154.
3. ibid., p. 156.

Hitler flatly disagreed with such a view, just as much as he disliked the military organization of the Frontbann, its rapid expansion and growing independence. In December, when new elections for the Reichstag were held, Röhm did not find a place on the Nazi list.

By the end of Hitler's year in prison these quarrels and disagreements had reached such a pitch that it appeared possible to write off the former Nazi Party as a serious force in German or Bavarian politics. The Reichstag elections of December 1924 confirmed this. The votes cast for the Nazi-Völkisch bloc fell by more than half, from 1,918,300 to 907,300; instead of 32 seats they had only 14 in the new Reichstag, less than five per cent of the total. Hitler had already remarked to Hess: 'I shall need five years before the movement is on top again.'

Much of the blame for this state of affairs fell on Hitler – with considerable justice. 'Hitler,' Ludecke writes, 'was the one man with power to set things straight; yet he never so much as lifted his little finger or spoke one word.'[1] Röhm, Strasser, Ludendorff, and Rosenberg all complained in the same exasperated terms. They could never get a firm answer from him. In disgust Rosenberg threw up the job of deputy leader of the Party. Twenty years later, reflecting on what had happened, while waiting to be tried by the International Court of Nuremberg, he wrote: 'Hitler deliberately allowed antagonistic groups to exist within the Party, so that he could play umpire and Führer.'[2]

Ludecke arrived at the same conclusion: 'To suppose that Hitler, behind prison walls, may have been ignorant of conditions outside is to be unjust to his political genius. A more reasonable supposition is that he was deliberately fostering the schism in order to keep the whip-hand over the party.'[3] And he succeeded. The plans for a united Völkisch Front came to nothing. Ludendorff and Röhm left in disgust, and no powerful Nazi group was created in the Reichstag under the leadership of someone else. The price of this disunity was heavy, but for Hitler it was worth paying. By the time he came out of prison the Party had broken up almost completely – but it had not found an alternative

1. Ludecke: p. 214.
2. *Rosenberg's Memoirs*, edited by Serge Lang and Ernst von Scherk (New York, 1949), p. 231.
3. Ludecke: p. 222.

leader, there was no rival to oust. Hitler's tactics of evasion and 'divide and rule' had worked well.

On 8 May 1924, and again on 22 September, the Bavarian State Police submitted a report to the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior recommending Hitler's deportation. Hitler could still be considered an Austrian citizen and put across the frontier. The second of these reports stated: 'The moment he is set free, Hitler will, because of his energy, again become the driving force of new and serious public riots and a menace to the security of the State. Hitler will resume his political activities, and the hope of the nationalists and racists that he will succeed in removing the present dissensions among the para-military troops will be fulfilled.'[1]

Thanks to the intervention of Gürtner, the Bavarian Minister of Justice, this threat of deportation was averted. In July Hitler formally resigned the leadership of the Party as a gesture of appeasement to the authorities. The activities of Röhm and the Frontbann temporarily endangered his release, but the failure of the Nazis in the December elections probably convinced the Bavarian Government that they had nothing more to fear from Hitler. On the afternoon of 20 December a telegram from the Public Prosecutor's office ordered Hitler's and Kriebel's release on parole. Adolf Müller, the Party's printer and Hoffmann at once drove out from Munich to fetch Hitler. Cap in hand and a raincoat belted over his shorts, he paused for his photograph to be taken. An hour or two later he walked up the stairs of 41 Thierschstrasse to the apartment he rented at the top of the house. His room was filled with flowers and laurel wreaths, his dog bounded down the stairs to greet him: he was home for Christmas.

II

Hitler's return from prison by no means meant the end of the quarrels and disunity in the Party. On 12 February 1925, Ludendorff, Strasser, and von Graefe resigned their leadership of the National Sozialistische Freiheitsbewegung, which was thereupon dissolved. After the fiasco of the presidential elections later in the spring the break between Hitler and Ludendorff became irreparable. In April Röhm demanded a decision about the future of the

1. Quoted by R. W. M. Kempner: *Blue Print of the Nazi Underground* (Research Studies of the State College of Washington, vol. XIII, No. 2, June 1945), p. 55.

Frontbann. The independent terms on which Röhm proposed cooperation between the political and military leadership were rejected by Hitler in a conversation on 16 April: rather than agree to these he preferred to let the Frontbann go and build up the S.A. again from scratch. The following day Röhm wrote to resign the leadership of both the S.A. and the Frontbann. Hitler sent no reply. On 30 April Röhm wrote again to Hitler. He ended his letter: 'I take this opportunity, in memory of the fine and difficult hours we have lived through together, to thank you (*Dir*) for your comradeship and to beg you not to exclude me from your personal friendship.'[1] But again Röhm got no reply. The next day a brief notice appeared in the *Völkischer Beobachter* announcing Röhm's resignation of his offices and withdrawal from politics. With Röhm, Brückner too left the Party. Earlier in April Pöhner had been killed in a road accident. Göring was still abroad; Kriebel retired to Carinthia and later went to Shanghai; Scheubner-Richter and Eckart were dead, Rosenberg offended. Not many were left with whom to begin the task of rebuilding.

Hitler's first move on leaving prison had been to consult Pöhner, and on Pöhner's advice he went to call on the Minister-President of Bavaria and leader of the strongly Catholic and particularist Bavarian People's Party, Dr Heinrich Held. The meeting took place on 4 January 1925. Despite Hitler's efforts at conciliation, Dr Held's reception was cold. The putsch, Hitler admitted, had been a mistake; his one object was to assist the Government in fighting Marxism; he had no use for Ludendorff's and the North Germans' attacks on the Catholic Church, and he had every intention of respecting the authority of the State. Held's attitude was one of scepticism tinged with contempt, but he agreed – with a little prompting from Gürtner, still Minister of Justice, and Held's friend as well as Hitler's – to raise the ban on the Party and its newspaper. 'The wild beast is checked,' was Held's comment to Gürtner. 'We can afford to loosen the chain.'[2]

The fact that Hitler had made his peace with the priest-ridden Bavarian Government only increased the scorn and hostility of Ludendorff and the North German Völkisch leaders, Reventlow and Graefe, who were outspoken in their hostility to the Church. Hitler was unrepentant; he even attacked the Völkisch deputies in the Bavarian Parliament for their failure to accept the offer of a

1. Röhm: p. 160.
2. Otto Strasser: *Hitler and I* (London, 1940), p. 71.

seat in Held's Cabinet. When one of the deputies replied that principles were more important than securing Hitler's release, Hitler retorted that his release would have been a thousand times more valuable for the movement than the principles of two dozen nationalist deputies.[1] This uncompromising attack lost him the support of most of the Völkisch bloc: only six of the twenty-four deputies in the Bavarian Landtag remained faithful to him, the rest broke away and gradually drifted into other parties. However compliant Hitler showed himself to Held and the Government, inside the Party he was determined to insist upon unconditional authority and obedience.

On 26 February 1925, the *Völkischer Beobachter* reappeared with a lengthy editorial from Hitler headed 'A New Beginning.' 'I do not consider it to be the task of a political leader,' Hitler wrote, 'to attempt to improve upon, or even to fuse together, the human material lying ready to his hand.'[2] This was his answer to those who still objected to Streicher and Esser. He added 'a special protest against the attempt to bring religious disputes into the movement or even to equate the movement with religious disputes. . . . Religious reformations cannot be made by political children, and in the case of these gentlemen it is very rarely that anything else is in question.'[3] This was his answer to the North German Völkisch movement which put anti-clericalism at the head of its programme.

The next day, 27 February, Hitler gathered the few who remained faithful for a mass meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller. But for the Munich Carnival he would have held it on 24 February, the fifth anniversary of the adoption of the Party's programme. Hitler telephoned to Anton Drexler asking him to take the chair, but Drexler demanded the exclusion of Esser: Hitler told him to go to the devil, and rang off. In Drexler's place, Max Amann conducted the meeting. Strasser, Röhm, and Rosenberg stayed away. Besides Amann, Hitler's only prominent supporters were Streicher and Esser, Gottfried Feder and Frick, and the Bavarian and Thuringian District Leaders, Buttmann and Dintner.

Hitler had not lost his gifts as an orator. When he finished speaking at the end of two hours there was loud cheering from the four thousand who filled the hall. He was perfectly frank in his claims.

1. Heiden: *Hitler*, pp. 196–7.
2. Heiden: *History of National Socialism*, pp. 97–8.
3. Baynes: vol. I, pp. 367–8.

If anyone comes and wants to impose conditions on me, I shall say to him: 'Just wait, my young friend, and see what conditions I impose on you. I am not contending for the favour of the masses. At the end of a year you shall judge, my comrades. If I have acted rightly, well and good. If I have acted wrongly, I shall resign my office into your hands. Until then, however, I alone lead the movement, and no one can impose conditions on me so long as I personally bear the responsibility. And I once more bear the whole responsibility for everything that occurs in the movement. . . . To this struggle of ours there are only two possible issues: either the enemy pass over our bodies or we pass over theirs, and it is my desire that, if in the struggle I should fall, the Swastika banner shall be my winding sheet.'[1]

In the glow of enthusiasm a reconciliation was effected. The leaders shook hands on the platform. Streicher spoke of Hitler's release as a gift from God. Buttmann declared: 'All my scruples vanished when the Führer spoke.'

With the re-founding of the Nazi Party in February 1925, Hitler set himself two objectives. The first was to establish his own absolute control over the Party by driving out those who were not prepared to accept his leadership without question. The second was to build up the Party and make it a force in German politics within the framework of the constitution. Ludecke reports a conversation with Hitler while he was still in Landsberg prison in which he said: 'When I resume active work it will be necessary to pursue a new policy. Instead of working to achieve power by an armed *coup*, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the Catholic and Marxist deputies. If out-voting them takes longer than out-shooting them, at least the result will be guaranteed by their own Constitution. Any lawful process is slow. . . . Sooner or later we shall have a majority – and after that, Germany.'[2]

The process was to prove even slower than Hitler had expected. Not only had he to begin at the beginning again, but the times were no longer so favourable as they had been in 1920–3. Hitler's speech on 27 February had been too successful, the display of his demagogic power too convincing. He had laid great stress on the need to concentrate opposition against a single enemy – Marxism and the Jew. But he had added, in an aside which delighted his audience: 'If necessary, by one enemy many can be meant.' In

1. Heiden: *Hitler*, p. 198; and R. T. Clark: *The Fall of the German Republic* (London, 1935), p. 190.
2. Ludecke: pp. 217–18.

other words, under cover of fighting Marxism and the Jew, the old fight against the State would be resumed. Such phrases as: 'Either the enemy will pass over our bodies or we over theirs,' scarcely suggested that Hitler's new policy of legality was very sincere. The authorities were alarmed and immediately afterwards prohibited him from speaking in public in Bavaria. This prohibition was soon extended to other German states as well. It lasted until May 1927 in Bavaria and September 1928 in Prussia, and was a severe handicap for a leader whose greatest asset was his ability as a speaker. Hitler, however, had no option but to obey. He was on parole for some time after leaving prison and he was anxious lest the Bavarian authorities might proceed with the threat to deport him. An interesting correspondence on the question of Hitler's citizenship between Hitler's lawyer, the Austrian Consul-General in Munich, and the Vienna authorities, is to be found in the Austrian police records. It illustrates the anxiety Hitler felt on this score in the mid 1920s.

An even more serious handicap was the improvement in the position of the country, which began while Hitler was in prison and had already been reflected in the reduced Nazi vote at the elections of December 1924. Three days after the unsuccessful putsch, on 12 November 1923, Dr Schacht had been appointed as special commissioner to restore the German currency; by the summer of 1924 he had succeeded and the inflation was at an end. At the end of February 1924, the threat to the stability of the Republic from either the extreme Left or the extreme Right had been mastered and the state of martial law ended. Stresemann's hopes of a settlement with the allied powers had not proved vain. A new reparations agreement – the Dawes Plan – was negotiated, and this was followed in turn by the evacuation of the Ruhr; the Locarno Pact, guaranteeing the inviolability of the Franco-German and Belgian-German frontiers: the withdrawal of allied troops from the first zone of the demilitarized Rhineland, and Germany's entry into the League of Nations by unanimous vote of the League Assembly on 8 September 1926. At each stage the Republican Government had had to meet with violent opposition from both the political extremes, from the Communists and from the Nationalists. The fact that on each occasion it had been able to carry its proposals through the Reichstag, and that in December 1924 the Social Democrat Party increased its vote by thirty per cent on a platform of the defence of the Republic,

suggested that at last the period of disturbance which had lasted from 1918 to the beginning of 1924 was at an end.

The presidential elections in the spring of 1925 appeared to mark a turning-point in the history of the Weimar Republic. President Ebert, the former Social Democratic Chancellor, who had held office since the Republic's foundation, died on 28 February 1925. In the election held at the end of March the Nazis put up Ludendorff as their candidate, but won no more than 211,000 votes out of a total of close on 27 millions. As none of the candidates obtained a clear majority, a second election was held in April. This time the Nazis abandoned Ludendorff (this was the cause of the final breach between Hitler and Ludendorff) and supported Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, who had been brought in at the last minute by the Nationalists. Hindenburg won by a narrow margin to the anger and dismay of the democratic and republican forces. But the Nazis had little cause for congratulation. For the election of Hindenburg, the greatest figure of the old Army, a devoted Monarchist, a Conservative, and a Nationalist, had the paradoxical effect, in the short run, of strengthening the Republic. The simple fact that Hindenburg was at the head of the State did more than anything else could have done to reconcile traditionally minded and conservative Germans to the Republican régime. At the same time his scrupulous respect for the democratic constitution during the first five years of his Presidency cut the ground away from under the feet of those who attacked the Republic as the betrayal of the national cause.

Hitler's emphasis on legality was an attempt to adjust the Party's policy to the changed situation in Germany. Legality was a matter of tactics; the ineradicable hostility towards the Republic and all its works, the purpose of overthrowing it, even if by legal means, remained unchanged. In these calmer and more prosperous days, however, Hitler's appeal to hatred, his tirades against 'intolerable burdens' and his prophecies of disaster found less and less response outside the ranks of the converted.

Money, too, was more difficult to find. Until 1929 Hitler had little success in his efforts to tap the political funds of heavy industry and big business. The principal sources of Party revenue remained the members' dues of a mark a month (of which only ten per cent was forwarded to Party headquarters), collections or charges for admission at meetings, such private subscriptions

as they could secure, and the income from the Party newspapers and publishing house in the hands of Max Amann.

The ban on his public speaking forced Hitler to turn more to writing between 1925 and 1928. The first volume of *Mein Kampf* was published in the summer of 1925. The style had been pruned and parts of it rewritten by Father Bernhard Stempfle who belonged to the Hieronymite Order and edited a small anti-Semitic paper in Miesbach. Four hundred pages long and costing the high price of twelve marks, the book sold 9,473 copies the year it was published. Sales went down from 6,913 in 1926 to 3,015 in 1928 (by which time the second volume had been published); they more than doubled in 1929 and shot up to 50,000 in 1930 and 1931. By 1940 six million copies had been sold.

No sooner had he finished the first volume of *Mein Kampf* than Hitler set to work on the second part which was published at the end of 1926. He then went on, in the summer of 1928, to dictate a book on foreign policy to his publisher, Max Amann. Amann, who already had *Mein Kampf* on his hands, was not eager to publish another slow-seller, especially as it repeated much that had already been said in *Mein Kampf*. The text soon went out of date and the typescript remained in Amann's office until after the war: it was finally published in 1961 as *Hitlers Zweites Buch*.

From 1925 the royalties from his book and the fees he received for newspaper articles were Hitler's principal source of personal income. After the war his income tax file was discovered, including his correspondence with the tax authorities on the expenses which he claimed.[1] Hitler described himself as a writer and gave his income as 19,843 Reichsmarks in 1925; 15,903 in 1926; 11,494 in 1927; 11,818 in 1928; and 15,448 in 1929. These figures correspond fairly closely to the royalties he received from *Mein Kampf*.

An additional source of income, not mentioned in his tax returns, was the fees which he received for articles published in the Nazi press. The high fees which he was believed to demand for these and which the struggling papers could ill afford to pay, were a cause of much grumbling against Hitler in Party circles.

How much Hitler personally received from the Party's funds or the contributions which he raised remains unknown. To all appearances the years 1925 to 1928 were a lean period for him:

1. cf. O. J. Hale's article 'Adolf Hitler, Taxpayer'. *American Historical Review*, July 1955, pp. 830–42.

he had difficulty in paying his taxes even on the incomplete return which he made, and he ran up considerable debts on which he had to pay interest of 1,706 marks in 1927. Yet he certainly did not live in poverty. He had always shown a particular liking for Berchtesgaden and the mountain scenery of the Bavarian Alps close to the Austrian frontier. After coming out of prison, he spent much of his time there, working on *Mein Kampf* and his newspaper articles. He stayed at first in a boarding house, the pension Moritz, then at the Deutsche Haus in Berchtesgaden. 'I lived there like a fighting cock,' he recalled later. 'Every day I went up to Obersalzberg which took me two and a half hours' walking there and back. That's where I wrote the second volume of my book. I was very fond of visiting the Dreimädlerhaus, where there were always pretty girls. This was a great treat for me. There was one of them, especially, who was a real beauty.'[1]

In 1928 Hitler rented a villa, Haus Wachenfeld, on the Obersalzberg for a hundred marks a month. It had been built by an industrialist from Buxtehude and Hitler later bought it. This was Hitler's home. 'I've spent up there,' he said later, 'the finest hours of my life. . . . It's there that all my great projects were conceived and ripened.' Although he later rebuilt Haus Wachenfeld on a grander scale and re-named it the Berghof, he remained faithful, as he put it, to the original house. As soon as he secured the lease of it, he persuaded his widowed half-sister, Angela Raubal, to come from Vienna and keep house for him, bringing with her her two daughters, with the elder of whom, then a pretty blonde of twenty, Hitler rapidly fell in love.

The following year, 1929, he rented a handsome nine-roomed flat in the fashionable Prinzregentenstrasse of Munich, taking the whole of the second floor of No. 16 and installing Frau Winter, the housekeeper, from the house in which he had lodged in the Thierschstrasse. Geli Raubal was given her own room in the new flat as well as at Obersalzberg.

Another expense which led to animated correspondence with the tax authorities was Hitler's car, a supercharged Mercedes, which he bought shortly after leaving Landsberg prison, at a cost of more than 20,000 marks. When asked to account for this expenditure, Hitler replied that he had raised a bank loan. He had, in fact, long displayed a passion for motoring, and quite apart from this believed that possession of a car was an important stage property for a politician. Before the 1923 putsch he had

1. *Hitler's Table Talk*, p. 215 (16–17 January 1942).

owned an old green Selve tourer, then a Benz which the police seized on his arrest. He did not drive himself but even in 1925 employed a chauffeur. There was another item which aroused the interest of the tax office: a private secretary (Hess), paid 300 marks a month, and an assistant as well as a chauffeur who received 200.

To be driven fast was a great pleasure to Hitler. It fitted the same dramatic picture of himself as the rhinoceros-hide whip which he carried with him wherever he went. But he also delighted to go off on a picnic with a few friends and Geli. This was, in fact, the time in his life when he enjoyed more private life than at any other, and he was later often to refer to it nostalgically.

Many times during the Russian campaign he recalled occasions such as that in 1925 when at the age of thirty-six he stayed with the Bechsteins as their guest at the Bayreuth Festival.

'I used to spend the day in leather shorts. In the evening I would put on a dinner jacket or tails to go to the opera. We made excursions by car into the Fichtelgebirge and the Franconian mountains. . . . My supercharged Mercedes was a joy to all. Afterwards, we would prolong the evening in the company of the actors, either at the theatre restaurant or on a visit to Berneck. . . . From all points of view, those were marvellous days.'[1]

III

Such success as the Nazis had at this time was due less to Hitler than to Gregor Strasser, who was threatening to take Hitler's place as the effective leader of the Party and was breaking new ground in the north of Germany and the Rhineland, where the Party had hitherto failed to penetrate. Gregor Strasser joined the Nazis at the end of 1920 and became the local leader in Lower Bavaria. A Bavarian by birth, and some three years younger than Hitler, he had won the Iron Cross, First Class, in the war and ended his service as a lieutenant. After the war he had married and opened a chemist's shop in Landshut. A powerfully built man with a strong personality, Strasser was an able speaker and an enthusiast of radical views who laid as much stress on the anti-capitalist points in the Nazi programme as on its nationalism. While Hitler was in prison Strasser had been one of the promoters of the attempt to create a united front with the North German Völkisch movement. A man of independent views, he was critical

1. *Hitler's Table Talk*, pp. 283–4; 348–9.

of Hitler's attitude and little disposed to submit to his demands for unlimited authority in the Party. Strasser had not attended the meeting on 27 February, and it was only a fortnight later that Hitler persuaded him to resume work in the Party by offering him the leadership in North Germany.

This suited Strasser very well, and with the help of his brother, Otto Strasser, he rapidly built up a following in the north and an organization which, while nominally acknowledging Hitler as leader, soon began to develop into a separate party. Gregor Strasser, who was a Reichstag deputy with a free pass on the railways and no ban to prevent him speaking in public, spent days and nights in the train, speaking several times in the week at one big town after another in the Rhineland, Hanover, Saxony, and Prussia. He founded a newspaper, the *Berliner Arbeitszeitung*, edited by Otto Strasser, and a fortnightly periodical, *Nationalsozialistische Briefe*, intended for Party officials. Strasser was particularly active in strengthening the organization of the movement, appointing district leaders and frequently coming down to talk with them. As editor of the *Briefe* and Gregor's private secretary, the Strassers secured a young Rhinelander, then still under thirty, a man of some education who had attended a number of universities, and written novels and film scripts which no one would accept, before taking a job as secretary to a Reichstag deputy. His name was Paul Josef Goebbels, and he soon showed himself to possess considerable talent as a journalist and as a speaker.

The Strasser brothers did not share Hitler's cynical disregard for any programme except as a means to power. Their own programme was vague enough, but it proposed the nationalization of heavy industry and the big estates in the interests of what they called 'State feudalism', together with the decentralization of political power on a federal basis, the break-up of Prussia and the establishment of a chamber of corporations on Fascist lines to replace the Reichstag. Hitler had little sympathy with these ideas, least of all with the Strassers' anti-capitalism and their demand for the breaking up of big estates, which embarrassed him in his search for backers among the industrialists and landowners. But while Hitler spent his time in Berchtesgaden, Gregor and Otto Strasser were actively at work extending their influence in the movement.

On 22 November 1925, the Strassers called together a meeting

of the North German district leaders in Hanover. Among the twenty-five present were Karl Kaufmann, from the Ruhr, subsequently Gauleiter of Hamburg; Bernhard Rust, later the Nazi Minister of Education; Kerrl, later Nazi Minister of Ecclesiastical Affairs; Robert Ley, from Cologne, in time the boss of Hitler's Labour Front; Friedrich Hildebrandt, after 1933 the Gauleiter of Mecklenburg; and Erich Koch, who became not only Gauleiter of East Prussia but, after 1941, Reichskommissar for the Ukraine. Hitler was represented by Gottfried Feder, but it was only by a bare majority that Feder was admitted to the meeting at all, after Goebbels had demanded his ejection.

The split between the Strassers and Hitler crystallized round a question which excited much feeling in Germany in 1925–6, whether the former German royal houses should be expropriated and whether their possessions should be regarded as their own private property or as the public property of the different states. On this issue Gregor and Otto Strasser sided with working-class opinion against the princes, while Hitler supported the propertied classes. At this time he was receiving fifteen hundred marks a month (three-quarters of his income) from the divorced Duchess of Sachsen-Anhalt, and he denounced the agitation as a Jewish swindle. The Hanover meeting voted to follow the Strasser line, only Ley and Feder supporting Hitler. When Feder protested in Hitler's name, Goebbels jumped to his feet: 'In these circumstances I demand that the petty bourgeois Adolf Hitler be expelled from the National Socialist Party.' Rust added: 'The National Socialists are free and democratic men. They have no pope who can claim infallibility.'[1] More important still, the Hanover meeting accepted the Strassers' programme and resolved to substitute it for the Twenty-five Points of the official programme adopted in February 1920. This was open revolt.

Hitler took time to meet the challenge, but when he did move he showed his skill in the way he outmanoeuvred Strasser without splitting the Party. On 14 February 1926 he summoned a conference in his turn, this time in the South German town of Bamberg. Hitler deliberately avoided a Sunday, when the North German leaders would have been free to attend in strength. As a result the Strasser wing of the Party was represented only by Gregor Strasser and Goebbels. In the south Hitler had made the position of District Leader (Gauleiter) a salaried office, a step which left the Gauleiters free to attend solely to Party business and

1. Strasser: *Hitler and I*, p. 97.

made them much more dependent upon himself. He could thus be sure of a comfortable majority in the meeting at Bamberg.

The two protagonists fought out their differences in a day-long debate which ranged over half a score of topics: Socialism, the plebiscite on the Princes' property, the policy of legality versus that of revolution, foreign affairs, the role of the working classes, and the organization of the Party. Strasser was outnumbered from the beginning, and Hitler added to his triumph by the capture of Goebbels, hitherto one of the Strassers' strongest supporters. Half-way through the meeting Goebbels stood up and declared that, after listening to Hitler, he was convinced that Strasser and he had been wrong, and that the only course was to admit their mistake and come over to Hitler. Having won his point, Hitler did all he could to keep Strasser in the Party. In the middle of the debate he put his arm round his shoulders and said: 'Listen, Strasser, you really mustn't go on living like a wretched official. Sell your pharmacy, draw on the Party funds and set yourself up properly as a man of your worth should.'[1] Hitler's conciliatory tactics proved successful. The Strasser programme was abandoned, a truce patched up and the unity of the Party preserved. This was not the end of the Strasser episode, but Hitler had handled his most dangerous rival with skill and papered over the breach between himself and the radical wing of the Party.

Hitler had still to face other difficulties in the Party. There was persistent criticism and grumbling at the amount of money the Leader and his friends took out of Party funds for their own expenses, and at the time he spent away from headquarters in Berchtesgaden, or driving around in a large motor-car at the Party's expense. An angry controversy started between Hitler and Gauleiter Munder of Württemberg which led to Munder's eventual dismissal in 1928. Quarrelling, slander, and intrigue over the most petty and squalid issues seemed to be endemic in the Party.

To keep these quarrels within bounds, Hitler set up a Party court in 1926, the Uschla, an abbreviated form of Untersuchungs- und Schlichtungs-Ausschuss (Committee for Investigation and Settlement). Its original chairman, the former General Heinemann, failed to understand that its primary purpose was to preserve Party discipline and the authority of the leader, turning a blind eye to dishonesty, crime, and immorality, except in so far

1. Strasser: op. cit., pp. 100–1.

as these affected the efficiency and unity of the Party. His successor, Major Walther Buch, understood his job better, and with the assistance of Ulrich Graf and a young Munich lawyer, Hans Frank (later Governor-General of Poland), turned the Uschla into an effective instrument for Hitler's tighter control over the Party.

In May 1926, Hitler summoned the Munich members of the Party to a meeting which was a logical consequence of the Bamberg conference of February. At this meeting a resolution was passed to the effect that henceforward the sole 'bearer' of the movement was the National Socialist German Workers' Association in Munich. The Munich group was to choose its own leadership, which would automatically become the leadership of the whole Party. Hitler explained that, although German law required the formal election of the chairman by the members, once elected he would have the right to appoint or dismiss the other Party leaders, including the Gauleiters, at his pleasure. At the same time the Twenty-five Points of the programme adopted in February 1920 were declared to be immutable, not because Hitler attached any importance to them, but as a further prop to his authority over the Party.

In July 1926, Hitler felt strong enough to hold a mass rally of the Party at Weimar, in Thuringia, one of the few States in which he was still allowed to speak. Five thousand men took part in the march past, with Hitler standing in his car and returning their salute, for the first time, with outstretched arm. Hoffman's photographs made it all look highly impressive, and a hundred thousand copies of the *Völkischer Beobachter* were distributed throughout the country. It was the first of the Reichsparteitage later to be staged, year after year, at Nuremberg.

Goebbels was now whole-heartedly Hitler's man. In November Hitler appointed him as Gauleiter of 'Red' Berlin, an assignment which was to stretch to the full his remarkable powers as an agitator. He took over a Party organization so riven with faction that Hitler had to dissolve it, and ordered Goebbels to begin again from the bottom. By moving Goebbels to Berlin Hitler not only strengthened the movement in a key position, but provided another check against the independence of the Strasser group. The Strasser brothers had kept their own press and publishing house in Berlin, and Goebbels, whose desertion to Hitler was regarded as rank treachery by the Strassers, employed every means in his power to reduce their influence and following. In

1927 he founded *Der Angriff* as a rival to the Strassers' paper, and used the S.A. to beat up their most loyal supporters. Appeals to Hitler by Gregor and Otto Strasser produced no effect: he declared he had no control over what Goebbels did. None the less it was Hitler's game that Goebbels was playing for him.

IV

For the next two years the fortunes of Hitler and the Nazi Party changed very little. The old trouble with the S.A. reappeared. In November 1926, Hitler reformed the S.A. and found a new commander in Captain Pfeffer von Salomon, but the ex-officers still thought only in military terms. The S.A. was to be a training ground for the Army and the height of their ambition was to hand it over lock, stock, and barrel to the Army, with jobs for themselves in the higher ranks. Both the Berlin and Munich S.A. leadership had to be purged. The Munich S.A. had become notorious for the homosexual habits of Lieutenant Edmund Heines and his friends: it was not for his morals, however, or his record as a murderer, that Hitler threw him out in May 1927, but for lack of discipline and insubordination. Such was the élite of the new Germany.

Whatever steps Hitler took, however, the S.A. continued to follow its own independent course. Pfeffer held as obstinately as Röhm to the view that the military leadership should be on equal terms with, not subordinate to, the political leadership. He refused to admit Hitler's right to give orders to his Stormtroops. So long as the S.A. was recruited from the ex-service and ex-Freikorps men who had so far provided both its officers and rank and file, Hitler had to tolerate this state of affairs. These men were not interested in politics; what they lived for was precisely this 'playing at soldiers' Hitler condemned – going on manoeuvres, marching in uniform, brawling, sitting up half the night singing camp songs and drinking themselves into a stupor, trying to recapture the lost comradeship and exhilaration of 1914–18. In time Hitler was to find an answer in the black-shirted S.S., a hand-picked corps d'élite (sworn to absolute obedience) very different from the ill-disciplined S.A. mob of camp followers. But it was not until 1929 that Hitler found the right man in Heinrich Himmler, who had been Gregor Strasser's adjutant at Landshut and later his secretary. In 1928 Himmler, who had been trained as an agriculturalist, was running a small poultry farm at

the village of Waldtrudering, near Munich. When he took over the S.S. from Erhard Heiden, the troop numbered no more than two hundred men, and it took Himmler some years before he could provide Hitler with what he wanted, an instrument of complete reliability with which to exercise his domination over the Party and eventually over the German nation.

Yet, if the Party still fell far short of Hitler's monolithic ideal, 1927 and 1928 saw a continuation of that slow growth in numbers and activity which had begun in 1926. In May 1927, after giving further assurances for his good behaviour, Hitler was again allowed to speak in Bavaria, and in September 1928 in Prussia. In August 1927, at the first of the Nuremberg Party days, thirty thousand S.A. men are said to have paraded before the Party Leader. From 27,000 in 1925 the number of dues-paying members rose to 49,000 in 1926, 72,000 in 1927, 108,000 in 1928, and 178,000 in 1929. An organization for far bigger numbers was already being built up. The country was divided into *Gaue*, corresponding roughly to the thirty-four Reichstag electoral districts, with a Gauleiter appointed by Hitler at its head. There were seven additional Gaue for Austria, Danzig, the Saar, and the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia. To the Hitler Youth were added the Nazi Schoolchildren's League (Schülerbund) and Students' League; the Order of German Women; a Nazi Teachers' Association, and unions of Nazi Lawyers and Nazi Physicians. The circulation of the *Völkischer Beobachter* crept up and the *Illustrierter Beobachter* was turned into a weekly.

By 1928 the Party organization was divided into two main branches: one directed by Gregor Strasser and devoted to attacking the existing régime, the other directed by Constantin Hierl and concerned with building up in advance the cadres of the new State. The first section had three divisions: foreign (Nieland), Press (Otto Dietrich), infiltration and the building up of party cells (Schumann). The second section consisted of Walther Darré (Agriculture), Wagener (Economics), Konopath (Race and Culture), Nicolai (work of the Ministry of the Interior), Hans Frank (Legal questions), Gottfried Feder (Technical questions), and Schulz (Labour Service).

Propaganda was a separate department, the director of which worked directly under Hitler. From October 1925 to January 1927, this had been Gregor Strasser's job, but Hitler had then transferred Strasser to build up the organization, and in November 1928 put in Goebbels as his propaganda chief. At the end of 1927

another familiar figure, Hermann Göring, returned to Germany from Sweden. Göring established himself in Berlin, living by his wits and his social connexions. Hitler, looking for just such contacts in upper-class Berlin, soon renewed his association with Göring. In May 1928, as their reward Göring and Goebbels were both elected to the Reichstag on the short Nazi list of twelve deputies, together with Strasser, Frick, and General von Epp, who had resigned from the Army to rejoin the Party. Hitler himself never stood as a candidate for the Reichstag. Since he was not a German citizen he was ineligible. He resigned his Austrian citizenship on 7 April 1925. This left him without a country. Efforts behind the scenes to persuade the Bavarian Government to make him a German national failed and Hitler would ask no favours in public of the Republican régime which he detested. He did not become naturalized until 1932, on the eve of his candidature for the German Presidency, when the Nazis had secured control of the State Government in Brunswick and were in a position to make the change without awkward questions being asked.

But the fact which overshadowed all Hitler's efforts in these years and dwarfed them into insignificance was the continued success of the Republican régime. By 1927 the despised Government of the 'November Criminals', the Jew-ridden 'Republic of Betrayal', had succeeded in restoring order, stabilizing the currency, negotiating a settlement of reparations, ending the occupation of the Ruhr, and securing Germany's entry into the League of Nations. To the Locarno Pact in the west Stresemann had added the settlement with the Soviet Union embodied in the Treaty of Berlin of April 1926, and to the evacuation of the First Zone of the demilitarized Rhineland the withdrawal of the Allied Military Control Commission at the end of January 1927. In August 1928, at the invitation of the French Government, Stresemann visited Paris to sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact renouncing war, on equal terms with the other Great Powers. The visit to Paris and the friendliness of Stresemann's reception symbolized the progress Germany had made, through the policy of 'Fulfilment', in recovering that equality of rights to which Hitler and the Nationalists never tired of appealing.

These successes in the political field, which, it might be argued, affected only that part of the nation which interested itself in politics, were matched by an economic recovery which touched

every man and woman in the country. The basis of this recovery was the huge amount of foreign money lent to Germany, especially by American investors, after the Dawes Plan and the re-establishment of the currency seemed to have made her a sound financial risk again. The official estimate of Germany's foreign debts at the end of 1930 was between 28,500 and 30,000 million gold marks, almost all of which had been borrowed between the beginning of 1924 and the beginning of 1929.[1]

Not only the German Government, but the States, the big cities, even the Churches, as well as industry and business, borrowed at high rates and short notice, spending extravagantly without much thought of how the loans were to be repaid except by borrowing more. In this way Germany made her reparation payments promptly, and at the same time financed the rationalization and re-equipment of her industry, great increases in social services of all kinds and a steady rise in the standard of living of all classes. During the inflation (1923) German industrial production had dropped to fifty-five per cent of the 1913 figure, but by 1927 it had recovered to a hundred and twenty-two per cent, a recovery which far outdistanced that of the United Kingdom.[2] Unemployment fell to six hundred and fifty thousand in the summer of 1928. In this same year retail sales showed an increase of twenty per cent over 1925 figures, while by next year, 1929, money wages had risen by eighteen per cent and real wages by ten per cent over the average for 1925.[3]

Against facts like these, translated into the simplest terms of more food, more money, more jobs, and more security, all Hitler's and Goebbels's skill as agitators made little headway. Hitler's instinct was right. The foundations of this sudden prosperity were exceedingly shaky, and Hitler's prophecies of disaster, although he was wrong in predicting a new inflation, were to be proved right. But, in 1927 and 1928, few in Germany wanted to listen to such gloomy threats, any more than they listened to the warnings of the President of the Reichsbank, Dr Schacht, or of the Agent-General for Reparations, Parker Gilbert.

The general mood of confidence and the sense of recovery after the fevers and exhaustion of the post-war years were reflected in

1. C. S. R. Harris: *Germany's Foreign Indebtedness* (Oxford, 1935), c. I.
2. W. Arthur Lewis: *Economic Survey, 1919–29* (London, 1949), p. 91.
3. Harris: Appendix IV, quoting the Report of the Agent-General for Reparations, 21 May 1930.

the results of the Reichstag elections held in May 1928. The Social Democrats, the party most closely identified with the Republic, increased their vote from 7·88 to 9·15 millions, while the Right-wing German National Party, who had been unwavering in their vilification of the Weimar régime, saw their support drop from 6·2 to 4·3 million votes. The Nazis polled only 810,000 votes and secured no more than twelve seats out of a total of 491, ranking as the ninth party in the Chamber.

Thus although Hitler had certainly made some progress in rebuilding the Party when judged by the level to which it had fallen in 1924–5, as soon as it was measured against the standards of national politics his success was seen to be negligible. At the end of 1928 Hitler was still a small-time politician, little known outside the south and even there regarded as part of the lunatic-fringe of Bavarian politics. These were the years of waiting, years in which Hitler had to face the worst of all situations, indifference and half-amused contempt, years in which it would have been all too easy for the movement to disintegrate and founder.

In September 1928, Hitler called a meeting of the Party leaders in Munich and talked to them frankly. Much of his speech was taken up with attempting to belittle Stresemann's achievement in foreign policy.

> In the first place our people must be delivered from the hopeless confusion of international convictions and educated consciously and systematically to fanatical Nationalism. . . . Second, in so far as we educate the people to fight against the delirium of democracy and bring it again to the recognition of the necessity of authority and leadership, we tear it away from the nonsense of parliamentarianism. Third, in so far as we deliver the people from the atmosphere of pitiable belief in possibilities which lie outside the bounds of one's own strength – such as the belief in reconciliation, understanding, world peace, the League of Nations, and international solidarity – we destroy these ideas. There is only one right in the world and that right is one's own strength.[1]

But he did not disguise the difficulties which lay ahead. Above all, they had to strengthen the individual Party comrade's confidence in the victory of the movement. 'It does not require much courage to do silent service in an existing organization. It requires more courage to fight against an existing political régime. . . . Attack attracts the personalities which possess more courage. Thus a condition containing danger within itself becomes a

1. Prange: pp. 39–40, quoting from the *Völkischer Beobachter* of 23 September 1928.

magnet for men who seek danger. . . . What remains is a minority of determined, hard men. It is this process which alone makes history explicable: the fact that certain revolutions, emanating from very few men and giving the world a new face, have actually taken place. . . . All parties, public opinion, take a position against us. But therein lies the unconditional, I might say the mathematical, reason for the future success of our movement. As long as we are the radical movement, as long as public opinion shuns us, as long as the existing factors of the State oppose us – we shall continue to assemble the most valuable human material around us, even at times when, as they say, all factors of human reason argue against it.'[1]

It was with such arguments that Hitler held the men around him together. This is the one striking quality of his leadership in these years, the fact that he never let go, never lost faith in himself and was able to communicate this, to keep the faith of others alive, in the belief that some time a crack would come and the tide at last begin to flow in his favour.

V

Hitler's first chance came in 1929, a prelude to the great crisis of 1930–3, and it came in the direction Hitler had foreseen, that of foreign policy.

Although Stresemann's policy had brought solid gains for Germany, nothing would appease the German National Party which continued to attack every item of the Versailles and subsequent settlements. The difficulties of Stresemann's position made him peculiarly vulnerable. Any concession to be secured from a grudging and suspicious France required much patience and circumspection: the policy of 'Fulfilment' could not be hurried. In these circumstances it was the easiest thing in the world for the Nationalists and Nazis to whip up German impatience and decry any success as insufficient and less than Germany was entitled to, attacking the Government for truckling to France and sacrificing national interests. Every outburst of this kind added to Stresemann's difficulties – and was meant to do so – by raising French resistance and casting doubts on his ability to speak for, or control, public opinion in Germany.

Hitler had been unwearying in his attacks on Stresemann. The very idea of reconciliation, of settlement by agreement, roused his

1. Heiden: *Der Führer*, p. 250.

anger. An appeal to nationalist resentment was an essential part of Hitler's stock-in-trade; at all costs that resentment must be kept alive and inflamed. France must be represented as the eternal enemy, and Stresemann's policy of 'Fulfilment' as blind illusion or, better still, deliberate treachery. So far this attack from the Right had failed to destroy the support of the majority for Stresemann's policy, but a better chance of success appeared to offer itself in 1929, and although in the end this, too, failed, the way in which the campaign was organized and the part Hitler was able to secure in it for himself marked a decisive stage in the rise of the Nazi Party.

The occasion was the renewal of negotiations for a final settlement of reparations. The Dawes Plan of 1924 had not attempted to fix the final amount to be paid by Germany or the number of years for which Germany was to continue to pay. In the winter of 1928–9 these questions were submitted to a committee of experts under the chairmanship of the American banker, Owen D. Young. After lengthy negotiations the Young Committee signed a report on 7 June 1929 which required the Germans to pay reparations for a further fifty-nine years. The annual payments were fixed on a graded scale, the average of which was considerably lower then the sum already being paid under the Dawes Plan (2,050 million marks a year as against 2,500 million). The total was substantially less than the 132 milliard gold marks originally claimed by the Allies, while the international controls over Germany's economy established by the Dawes Plan were to be abolished. Whatever doubts he may have entertained, Stresemann proposed to accept these terms, although they were far stiffer than those contained in the German proposals to the Committee, in the hope that thereby he could secure evacuation of the remaining zones of the Occupied Rhineland. In the international conference which met at the Hague in August 1929 he succeeded in linking the two questions of reparations and evacuation, and in persuading the French to agree that the withdrawal of the occupying forces should begin in September, five years ahead of time, and be completed by the end of June 1930.

This was the last of Stresemann's triumphs. He died on 3 October 1929, worn out by the exertions of the past six years. Before he died he had overcome the opposition of the French, but the Germans still remained to be convinced. On 9 July 1929, a national committee had been formed to organize a campaign for a

plebiscite rejecting the new reparations settlement and the 'lie' of Germany's war-guilt which represented the legal basis of the Allies' claims. From then until 13 March 1930, when President Hindenburg finally signed the legislation in which the Young Plan was embodied, the Press and parties of the German Right united in a most violent campaign to defeat the Government and to use the issues of foreign policy and reparations for their ultimate purpose of overthrowing, or at least damaging, the hated Republic. It was by means of this campaign that Hitler first made his appearance on the national stage of German politics.

The leader of the agitation was Alfred Hugenberg, a bigoted German nationalist whose aim was to tear up the Versailles Treaty, overthrow the Republic, and smash the organized working-class movement. An ambitious, domineering and unscrupulous man of sixty-three, Hugenberg had large resources at his disposal. At one time a director of Krupps, he made a fortune out of the inflation and with it bought up a propaganda empire, a whole network of newspapers and news agencies, as well as a controlling interest in the big U.F.A. film trust. These he used not so much to make money as to push his own views. In 1928 he took over the leadership of the German National Party and by his extravagant opposition in the next two years caused a secession of more moderate members.

Hugenberg could count on the support of the Stahlhelm, by far the largest of the German ex-servicemen's organizations, under the leadership of Franz Seldte; of the Pan-German League, whose chairman, Heinrich Class, joined Hugenberg's Committee for the Initiative; and of powerful industrial and financial interests, represented by Dr Albert Voegler, General Director of the big United Steel (Vereinigte Stahlwerke), and later by the President of the Reichsbank, Dr Hjalmar Schacht, the two chief German delegates to the Young Committee, both of whom came out violently against the Plan. What they lacked was mass support, someone to go out and rouse the mob. Through Finanzrat Bang, Hitler and Hugenberg were brought together and met at the Deutscher Orden, a nationalist club in Berlin. Hitler was not easily persuaded to come in, partly because of the opposition to such an alliance with the reactionary Hugenberg and the representatives of industry which he could expect to meet from the radical Strasser group. But the advantages of being able to draw on the big political funds at the disposal of Hugenberg, and the

offer of an equal position with the National Party in launching the agitation, converted him. He put his price high: complete independence in waging the campaign in his own way, and a large share of the Committee's resources to enable him to do it.[1] For his representative on the Joint Finance Committee Hitler deliberately chose Gregor Strasser: when others in the Party complained, he laughed and told them to wait until he had finished with his allies.

In September 1929, Hugenberg and Hitler published a draft 'Law against the Enslavement of the German People'. After repudiating Germany's responsibility for the war, Section III demanded the end of all reparations and Section IV the punishment of the Chancellor, the Cabinet, and their representatives for high treason if they agreed to new financial commitments. For their bill to be submitted to the Reichstag the sponsors had to secure the support of ten per cent of the electorate; the lists were opened on 16 October and they got the votes of 10·02 per cent, not many over four millions. After all the violent propaganda about turning Germany into a 'Young Colony', crippling national survival for two generations, and enslaving the nation to foreign capitalists, this was a sharp failure. The Committee had even less success in the Reichstag when the Bill was introduced at the end of November and defeated clause by clause, one group of the German National Party under Treviranus refusing to vote for the controversial Section IV and breaking away from Hugenberg. The submission of the motion to a national plebiscite at the end of December, the final stage in the process, underlined the defeat of the extremists. To win, Hugenberg and Hitler needed more than twenty-one million votes; they got less than six million. The bills embodying the legislation for carrying out the Young Plan were passed by the Reichstag on 12 March 1930. The last hope of the Nationalists was that President Hindenburg would refuse to sign them, and pressure was exerted on him by his Nationalist friends. But Hindenburg refused to be diverted from his constitutional duty, and on 13 March put his signature to the Young Plan laws. The fury of the Hugenberg and Nazi Press and their open attacks on the President ('Is Hindenburg still alive?'

1. Fritz Thyssen wrote later that he first financed the National Socialist Party for a single reason: because he wanted to defeat the Young Plan. Cf. Thyssen: *I Paid Hitler*, p. 118.

Goebbels sneered in *Der Angriff*) revealed the bitterness of their defeat.

But the defeat for Hugenberg and his 'Freedom Law' was no defeat for Hitler. In the preceding six months he had succeeded for the first time in breaking into national politics and showing something of his ability as a propagandist. Every speech made by Hitler and the other Nazi leaders had been carried with great prominence by the Hugenberg chain of papers and news agencies. To millions of Germans who had scarcely ever heard of him before Hitler had now become a familiar figure, thanks to a publicity campaign entirely paid for by Hugenberg's rival party. More important still, he had attracted the attention of those who controlled the political funds of heavy industry and big business to his remarkable gifts as an agitator. This, in Hitler's eyes, far outweighed the defeat.

Already, through the agency of Otto Dietrich, Hitler had been brought into touch with Emil Kirdorf. Otto Dietrich, who was soon to become Hitler's Press Chief, was the son-in-law of Reismann-Grone of Essen, the owner of the *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung* (the paper of the Ruhr industrialists), and political adviser to the Mining Union (Bergbaulicher Verein). Kirdorf was one of the biggest names in German industry, the chief shareholder of the Gelsenkirchen Mine Company, the founder of the Ruhr Coal Syndicate, and the man who controlled the political funds of the Mining Union and the North-west Iron Association, the so-called Ruhr Treasury (Ruhrschatz). At the Nuremberg Party Day of August 1929, Kirdorf was a guest of honour and was so impressed by the sixty thousand National Socialists who assembled to cheer their leader that he wrote afterwards to Hitler: 'My wife and I shall never forget how overwhelmed we were in attending the memorial celebration for the World War dead.'[1] From now on Hitler could count upon increasing interest and support from at least some of those who, like Kirdorf, had money to invest in nationalist, anti-democratic and anti-working-class politics.

With this money Hitler began to put the Party on a new footing. He took over the Barlow Palace, an old mansion on the Briennerstrasse in Munich, and had it remodelled as the Brown House. A grand staircase led up to a conference chamber, furnished in red leather, and a large corner room in which Hitler received his visitors beneath a portrait of Frederick the Great. The Brown

1. Heiden: *Der Führer*, p. 271.

House was opened at the beginning of 1931, a very different setting from the dingy rooms in the Corneliusstrasse or the Schellingstrasse. Before that, in 1929, Hitler himself had moved to a large nine-roomed flat covering the entire second floor of No. 16 Prinzregentenstrasse, one of Munich's fashionable streets. Frau Winter, from the Thierschstrasse, came to keep house for him, while Frau Raubal continued to look after Haus Wachenfeld at Berchtesgaden. Hitler himself was now seen more frequently in Munich, occasionally in the company of his favourite niece, Geli Raubal, who had a room in the new flat.

Not only the paymasters, but also the voters of the Right had been impressed by the fact that whatever success had been won in the campaign against the Young Plan was due to Hitler and the Nazis. For years Hitler had been pouring scorn on the bourgeois parties of the Right for their 'respectable' inhibitions and their failure to go to the masses. Now he had been able to demonstrate, on a larger scale than ever before, what he meant. He underlined his criticism by promptly breaking with the National Party once the campaign was over and placing the entire blame for the failure on their half-hearted support. The fact that the Nationalists had split over Hugenberg's tactics added weight to Hitler's criticism, and the lesson was not lost on those who sought more effective means to damage and undermine the democratic Republic. In the provincial elections from October 1929 onwards, the Nazis made considerable gains in Baden, Lübeck, Thuringia, Saxony, and Brunswick, as well as in the communal and municipal elections in Prussia – and they made them very largely at the expense of the National Party. In Thuringia, in December, they won eleven per cent of the votes cast and Frick became the first Nazi to assume office as Thuringian Minister of the Interior. In the summer of 1929 the membership of the Nazi Party had been 120,000; by the end of 1929 it was 178,000; by March 1930 it had grown to 210,000.

At the Party conference which followed the alliance with Hugenberg Hitler had had to meet a good deal of criticism, voiced by Gregor Strasser, of the dangers of being tarred with the reactionary brush and losing support by too close association with the 'old gang', the old ruling class of pre-war Germany, the industrialists, the Junkers, the former generals, and higher officials who were the backbone of the National Party. His critics had underestimated Hitler's unscrupulousness, that characteristic

duplicity, now first exhibited on this scale. With considerable skill he turned an episode which in itself was an outright failure to great political advantage for himself and his Party, then not only dropped the alliance with Hugenberg and the Nationalists as unexpectedly as he had made it, but proceeded to attack them. For Hugenberg the campaign against the Young Plan was one more in the disastrous series of mistakes which marked his leadership of the National Party; for Hitler it was a decisive stage, the foundations for the use which he was able to make of the months of opportunity ahead.

VI

In the six years since the ending of 1923 Germany had made an astonishing recovery. This recovery, however, was abruptly ended in 1930 under the impact of the World Depression. The fact that 1930 was also the year in which Hitler and the Nazi Party for the first time became a major factor in national politics is not fortuitous. Ever since he came out of prison at the end of 1924 Hitler had prophesied disaster, only to see the Republic steadily consolidate itself. Those who had ever heard of Adolf Hitler shrugged their shoulders and called him a fool. Now, in 1930, disaster cast its shadow over the land again, and the despised prophet entered into his inheritance. Three years later he told a Munich audience: 'We are the result of the distress for which the others were responsible.'[1] It was the depression which tipped the scales against the Republic and for the first time since 1923 shifted the weight of advantage to Hitler's side.

No country in the world was more susceptible to the depression, which began in the U.S.A. in 1929, intensified and spread in 1930 and 1931, and lasted throughout 1932. Its economic symptoms were manifold: contracting trade and production, cessation of foreign loans and the withdrawal of money already lent, falls in prices and wages, the closing of factories and businesses, unemployment and bankruptcy, the forced sale of property and farms. The foundation of German economic recovery had been the large amounts of money borrowed from abroad. Not only had much of this borrowed money been spent extravagantly; no one had faced the question of how it was to be repaid if the supply of further loans came to an end, and the money already lent,

1. Speech at Munich, 24 February 1933 (Baynes: vol. I, p. 252).

much of it on short-term credit, were to be reclaimed. This began to happen in 1929. At the same time a sharp contraction of world trade made it more difficult than ever for Germany to support herself and pay her way by any increase in exports. Thus, only a few years after the experience of inflation, Germany in 1930–2 again faced a severe economic crisis.

Hitler neither understood nor was interested in economics, but he was alive to the social and political consequences of events which, like the inflation of 1923, affected the life of every family in Germany. The most familiar index of these social consequences is the figure for unemployment. In Germany this rose from 1,320,000 in September 1929 to 3,000,000 in September 1930, 4,350,000 in September 1931, and 5,102,000 in September 1932. The peak figures reached in the first two months of 1932, and again of 1933, were over six millions.[1] These, it should be added, are the figures for only the registered unemployment; they do not give the whole picture of actual unemployment in the country, nor do they take account of short-time working. Translate these figures into terms of men standing hopelessly on the street corners of every industrial town in Germany; of houses without food or warmth; of boys and girls leaving school without any chance of a job, and one may begin to guess something of the incalculable human anxiety and embitterment burned into the minds of millions of ordinary German working men and women. In the history of Great Britain it is no exaggeration to describe the mass unemployment of the early 1930s as the experience which has made the deepest impression on the working class of any in the present century. In Germany the effect was still more marked since it came on top of the defeat and the inflation, through which most of these people had already lived.

The social consequences of the depression were not limited to the working class. In many ways it affected the middle class and the lower middle class just as sharply. For they – the clerks, shopkeepers, small business men, the less successful lawyers and doctors, the retired people living on their savings – were threatened with the loss not only of their livelihood, but of their respectability. The middle classes had no trade unions or unemployment insurance, and poverty carried a stigma of degradation for them that it did not have for the working class. The small property holder, shopkeeper, or business man was forced to sell, only to

1. The figures are those supplied by the I.L.O. and printed in the League of Nations Year Books.

see his property bought up at depreciated values by the big men. As during the inflation, anti-capitalist feeling against the combines, the trusts, and department stores spread widely amongst a class which had once owned, or still owned, property itself.

Nor was the impact of the slump limited to the towns. The fall in agricultural prices was one of the first and most severe symptoms of the crisis. In many parts of Germany the peasants and farmers were in an angry and desperate mood, unable to get a fair return for the work put into raising crops or stock, yet hard pressed to pay the interest on mortgages and loans or be turned out of their homes.

Like men and women in a town stricken by an earthquake, millions of Germans saw the apparently solid framework of their existence cracking and crumbling. In such circumstances men are no longer amenable to the arguments of reason. In such circumstances men entertain fantastic fears, extravagant hatreds, and extravagant hopes. In such circumstances the extravagant demagogy of Hitler began to attract a mass following as it had never done before.

The scale of the depression was not yet evident in the spring and early summer of 1930 and its full force was not to strike Germany until 1931, but it was already clear that economic crisis would produce a political crisis as well – more than a change of government, a crisis of the régime. The greatest weakness of the Weimar Republic from the beginning had been its failure to provide a stable party basis for government. In the Reichstag elections of 1930, for instance, ten parties polled more than a million votes each, a state of division which made it impossible for any of the parties to have a clear majority. Coalition government need not necessarily have meant weak government. In Prussia, where the Social Democrats and the Centre Party commanded a steady majority, the State Government enjoyed a stability which made it the bulwark of democracy in Germany and a particular object of hatred to both the Nazis and the Communists. But in the Reichstag elections, unlike those for the Prussian Diet, the three parties which had been responsible for the adoption of the Weimar Constitution, the so-called Weimar Coalition of the Social-Democrats, the Catholic Centre, and the Democrats, never again obtained a majority after 1919. They could only form a ministry with a majority in the Reichstag if they took in other parties, which meant stretching agreement to disagree to such a

point that any firmness of policy was excluded. On the other hand, the chief Opposition parties, the German National Party on the Right, and the Communists on the Left, were never able themselves to construct a coalition which could take the place of the Weimar parties.

The party leaders, absorbed in manoeuvring and bargaining for party advantages – *Kuhhandel*, cattle-trading, is the expressive German word – were not displeased with this situation. Weak governments suited them to this extent that it made those in power more accessible to party pressure and blackmail. But the short-sightedness of this view became evident the moment the country was faced with a major crisis. From March 1930 it no longer proved possible to construct a coalition government which could be sure of a majority of votes in the Reichstag. Each section of the community – industrialists, trade unionists, shopkeepers, landowners, farmers – looked to the State for aid and relief while grudging it to the others. Instead of drawing closer together to establish a government of unity with an agreed programme, the parties insisted on forwarding the sectional economic interests they represented, without regard to the national interests. Differences on the share of sacrifice each class was to bear – whether unemployment pay and wages were to be cut, taxes raised, a capital levy exacted, tariffs increased, and help given to landowners and farmers – were allowed to become so bitter that the methods of parliamentary government, which in Germany meant the construction of a coalition by a process of political bargaining, became more and more difficult to follow. Dr Brüning, who became Chancellor at the end of March 1930, had to rely on precarious majorities in the Reichstag laboriously reassembled for each piece of legislation. Effective government on such a basis was impossible. On 16 July 1930, the Reichstag rejected part of the Government's fiscal programme by 256 votes to 193. Thereupon the President, by virtue of the emergency powers granted to him in Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, put the Chancellor's programme into effect by decree. The Reichstag challenged the constitutionality of this action and passed a further motion demanding the abrogation of the decrees. Brüning's retort was to dissolve the house and fix new elections.

The responsibility for this deadlock has been much disputed. The case against the Party leaders is that they forced Brüning to act as he did by their refusal to combine; the case against Brüning is that he failed to do all that could have been done to win

parliamentary support and that he was too quick to resort to emergency powers. But whoever bore the responsibility, one thing was clear: unless the new elections produced the basis for a stable coalition, which seemed unlikely, parliamentary institutions were in danger of being discredited by their failure to provide the strong government which the country so obviously needed.

Such a situation was much to the advantage of the Nazis, who had been unremitting in their attacks on the parliamentary republic and democratic methods of government. The Nazis had already shown they were alive to the possibilities opening before them by launching a propaganda campaign especially designed to win support among the first class to feel the onset of the depression, the farmers. Through Hess, Hitler had met a German agricultural expert, Walther Darré (like Hess and Rosenberg, born abroad), who had recently written a book on the peasantry as the 'Life Source of the Nordic Race'. Hitler was impressed by Darré and appointed him as the Party's agricultural adviser with the commission to draw up a peasant programme. This was published over Hitler's name on 6 March 1930, and was marked not only by practical proposals to give economic aid to the farming population – State-credits, reduction and remission of taxes, higher tariffs, cheaper artificial manures, cheaper electricity, and the revision of the inheritance laws – but also by its insistence upon the peasantry as the most valuable class in the community. In the years ahead the support which the Nazis received from the rural districts of Germany richly repaid the work of propaganda and organization they began to undertake there during 1930.

In the case of agriculture it was simple to play for the support of both the big landowners and the peasants, since these had a common economic interest in the demand for protection and higher prices, and a common grievance in their neglect by parties which were too preoccupied with the urban population of Germany. But when it came to industry, business, and trade (especially the retail trade), it was not so easy to square the circle, for here there was an open clash of interests and bitter antagonism between the workers and the employers, no less than between the small trader or shopkeeper and the big companies and department stores. Hitler needed the support of both, of the industrialists and big business interests because they controlled the

funds to finance his organization and propaganda, of the masses because they had the votes. But in origin the National Socialists had been a radical anti-capitalist party, and this side of the Nazi programme was not only taken seriously by many loyal Party members but was of increasing importance in a period of economic depression.

The question, how seriously Hitler took the socialist character of National Socialism, had already been raised both before and after 1923. It was to remain one of the main causes of disagreement and division within the Nazi Party up to the summer of 1934; this was well illustrated in 1930 by the final breach between Hitler and Otto Strasser.

When Gregor Strasser moved to Munich, his brother Otto remained in Berlin, and through his paper, the *Arbeitsblatt* (which was actually still the official Nazi journal in the north), and his publishing house, the Kampfverlag, maintained an independent radical line which irritated and embarrassed Hitler. In April 1930, the trade unions in Saxony declared a strike, and Otto Strasser came out in full support of their action in the papers which he controlled, notably the *Sächsischer Beobachter*, the Nazi paper in Saxony. It was made perfectly plain to Hitler by the industrialists, on their side, that unless the Party at once repudiated the stand Strasser had taken there would be no more subsidies. With the help of Mutschmann, the Gauleiter of Saxony, Hitler enforced an order that no member of the Party was to take part in the strike, but he was unable to silence Strasser's papers. Following this, on 21 May Hitler suddenly appeared in Berlin and invited Otto Strasser to meet him for a discussion at his hotel. Strasser agreed, and on that day and the next they ranged over the whole field of their differences. The only account we possess of the discussion is Otto Strasser's, but there is little doubt that it can be accepted as accurate in substance. It was published very shortly afterwards, it was never challenged or repudiated by Hitler – although it must have done him considerable damage in some quarters – and all that Hitler is reported to have said is perfectly consistent with his known opinions.[1]

Hitler's tactics were a characteristic mixture of bribery, appeals, and threats. He offered to take over the Kampfverlag on generous terms, and make Otto Strasser his Press Chief for the entire

1. The account that follows is taken from Otto Strasser: *Ministersessel oder Revolution?*, the pamphlet version he published at the time (1930), and from the briefer English version in Otto Strasser: *Hitler and I*, pp. 109–27.

Reich; he appealed to him, with tears in his eyes and in the name of his brother Gregor, as an ex-soldier and a veteran National Socialist; he threatened that if Strasser would not submit to his orders he would drive him and his supporters out of the Party and forbid any Party member to have anything to do with him or his publications.

The discussion began with an argument about race and art, but soon shifted to political topics. Hitler attacked an article Strasser had published on 'Loyalty and Disloyalty', in which the writer, Herbert Blank, had distinguished between the Idea, which is eternal, and the Leader, who is only its servant. 'This is all bombastic nonsense,' Hitler declared, 'it boils down to this, that you would give every Party member the right to decide on the idea – even to decide whether the leader is true to the so-called idea or not. This is democracy at its worst, and there is no place for such a view with us. With us the Leader and the Idea are one, and every Party member has to do what the Leader orders. The Leader incorporates the Idea and alone knows its ultimate goal. Our organization is built up on discipline. I have no wish to see this organization broken up by a few swollen-headed littérateurs. You were a soldier yourself. . . . I ask you: are you prepared to submit to this discipline or not?'

After further discussion, Otto Strasser came to what he regarded as the heart of the matter. 'You want to strangle the social revolution,' he told Hitler, 'for the sake of legality and your new collaboration with the bourgeois parties of the Right.'

Hitler, who was rattled by this suggestion, retorted angrily: 'I am a Socialist, and a very different kind of Socialist from your rich friend, Reventlow. I was once an ordinary working-man. I would not allow my chauffeur to eat worse than I eat myself. What you understand by Socialism is nothing but Marxism. Now look: the great mass of working-men want only bread and circuses. They have no understanding for ideals of any sort whatever, and we can never hope to win the workers to any large extent by an appeal to ideals. We want to make a revolution for the new dominating caste which is not moved, as you are, by the ethic of pity, but is quite clear in its own mind that it has the right to dominate others because it represents a better race: this caste ruthlessly maintains and assures its dominance over the masses.

'What you preach is liberalism, nothing but liberalism,' Hitler continued. 'There are no revolutions except racial revolutions: there cannot be a political, economic, or social revolution – always

and only it is the struggle of the lower stratum of inferior race against the dominant higher race, and if this higher race has forgotten the law of its existence, then it loses the day.'

On the next day, 22 May, the conversation was continued in the presence of Gregor Strasser, Max Amann, Hess, and one of Otto Strasser's supporters, Hinkel. Strasser had demanded the nationalization of industry. Hitler regarded such a proposal with scorn: 'Democracy has laid the world in ruins, and nevertheless you want to extend it to the economic sphere. It would be the end of German economy. . . . The capitalists have worked their way to the top through their capacity, and on the basis of this selection, which again only proves their higher race, they have a right to lead. Now you want an incapable Government Council or Works Council, which has no notion of anything, to have a say: no leader in economic life would tolerate it.'

When Strasser asked him what he would do with Krupps if he came to power, Hitler at once replied: 'Of course I should leave it alone. Do you think that I should be so mad as to destroy Germany's economy? Only if people should fail to act in the interests of the nation, then – and only then – would the State intervene. But for that you do not need any expropriation, you do not need to give the workers the right to have a voice in the conduct of the business: you need only a strong State.'

For the moment the conversation was left unfinished. But at the end of June Hitler wrote to Goebbels instructing him to drive Otto Strasser and his supporters from the Party. Goebbels obliged with alacrity. Otto Strasser stuck to his Socialist principles, published his talks with Hitler, broke with his brother Gregor (who stayed with Hitler), and set up a Union of Revolutionary National Socialists, later known as the Black Front.The dispute over the socialist objectives of National Socialism was not yet settled – it was to reappear again and again in the next few years – but Hitler had only gained, not lost, by making clear his own attitude. Even in the provincial elections in Saxony, held in June, 1930, the Nazi representation rose from five to fourteen, making them the second strongest party in Saxony, despite Hitler's open repudiation of the strike earlier in the year. In September the Nazi success at the National elections astonished the world. It was Hitler, not Strasser, who captured the mass vote, while the Black Front dwindled into insignificance and its founder sought refuge over the frontier.

VII

In the election campaign, which followed the dissolution in July and led up to polling day on 14 September, the Nazis used every trick of propaganda to attract attention and win votes. In the big towns there was a marked increase in public disorder in which the S.A. took a prominent part. Slogans painted on walls, posters, demonstrations, rallies, mass meetings, crude and unrestrained demagogy, anything that would help to create an impression of energy, determination and success was pressed into use. Hitler's appeal in the towns was especially to the middle class hit by the depression, and was aimed to take votes from the more moderate and respectable bourgeois parties like the Democrats, the People's Party, and the Economic Party – as well as from the rival parties of the Right, Hugenberg's Nationalists and the break-away Conservatives of Treviranus. He had advantages over both. He was prepared to be much more extreme than the middle-class parties at a time when extremism was the growing mood, and he was able to exploit German nationalism and xenophobia without rousing the dislike many people felt for the Nationalists and Conservatives as 'class' parties, preoccupied with putting the old ruling class back in power. What Hitler offered them was their own lower middle-class brand of extremism – radical, anti-Semitic, against the trusts and the big capitalists, but at the same time (unlike the Communists and the Social Democrats) socially respectable; nationalist, pan-German, against Versailles and reparations, without looking back all the time (as the Nationalists did) to the lost glories and social prestige of the past and the old Imperial Germany.

At the same time the Nazis devoted much time and attention to the rural voter, and in both town and countryside swept in the new generation. Many who were voting for the first time responded eagerly to attacks on the 'System' which left them without jobs, and to the display of energy, the demand for discipline, sacrifice, action and not talk, which was the theme of Nazi propaganda.

In 1930 the mood of a large section of the German nation was one of resentment. Hitler, with an almost inexhaustible fund of resentment in his own character to draw from, offered them a series of objects on which to lavish all the blame for their misfortunes. It was the Allies, especially the French, who were to

blame, with their determination to enslave the German people; the Republic, with its corrupt and self-seeking politicians; the money barons, the bosses of big business, the speculators and the monopolists; the Reds and the Marxists, who fostered class hatred and kept the nation divided; above all, the Jews, who fattened and grew rich on the degradation and weakness of the German people. The old parties and politicians offered no redress; they were themselves contaminated with the evils of the system they supported. Germany must look to new men, to a new movement to raise her up again, to make her strong and feared, to restore to her people the dignity, security and prosperity which were their birthright, to recover the old German virtues of discipline, industry, self-reliance, and self-respect.

To audiences weighed down with anxiety and a sense of helplessness Hitler cried: If the economic experts say this or that is impossible, to hell with economics. What counts is will, and if our will is hard and ruthless enough we can do anything. The Germans are the greatest people on earth. It is not your fault that you were defeated in the war and have suffered so much since. It is because you were betrayed in 1918 and have been exploited ever since by those who are envious of you and hate you; because you have been too honest and too patient. Let Germany awake and renew her strength, let her remember her greatness and recover her old position in the world, and for a start let's clear out the old gang in Berlin.

This is a fair summary of the sort of speech Hitler and his lieutenants made in hundreds of meetings in the summer of 1930. Their opponents scorned such methods as being demagogy of the most blatant kind, but it showed a psychological perception of the mood of a large section of the German people which was wholly lacking from the campaigns of the other parties. Hitler never forgot the principle he had underlined in *Mein Kampf*: go for the masses. Their neglect of this accounted, in Hitler's eyes, for the failure of the other principal Right-wing Party, the Nationalists, to recover its old position in the country. Only the Communists could rival Hitler in this sort of agitation, but the Communists deliberately limited their appeal to one class, while Hitler aimed to unite the discontented of all classes; the Communists were hampered by rigid doctrinaire beliefs, while Hitler was prepared to adapt or abandon his programme to suit his audience; and the Communists, while they could outbid the Nazis in radicalism, could not hope to match the skill with which Hitler

played on the nationalist drum as well, potentially the most powerful appeal in German politics.

In the middle of September thirty million Germans went to the polls, four millions more than in 1928. The results surprised even Hitler, who had hoped at most for fifty or sixty seats. The Nazi vote leaped from the 1928 figure of 810,000 to 6,409,600, and their numbers in the Reichstag from 12 to 107. From ninth the Nazis had become the second Party in the State. Little less spectacular were the Communists' gains, 4,592,000 votes as against 3,265,000 in 1928, and 77 in place of 54 deputies in the Reichstag. The two parties which had openly campaigned for the overthrow of the existing régime and had deliberately framed their appeal in extremist terms had together won close on a third of the votes and of the seats in the new House. The three bourgeois parties, the Democrats, the People's Party, and the Economic Party, had lost a million and a quarter of their 1928 votes between them, and had completely failed to capture the new votes of those who went to the polls for the first time. Still more interesting from Hitler's point of view was the fact that the biggest set-back in the elections had been suffered by his chief rivals on the Right, the Nationalists, whose vote fell from 4,381,600 in 1928 to 2,458,300 in 1930. Although Hugenberg succeeded in reuniting some of the factions into which the German National Party had been split, with only 41 deputies against Hitler's 107 he was now in a position of inferiority in any combination of the Right that might be proposed.

Overnight, therefore, Hitler had become a politician of European importance. The foreign correspondents flocked to interview him. *The Times* printed his assurances of goodwill at length, while in the *Daily Mail* Lord Rothermere welcomed Hitler's success as a reinforcement of the defences against Bolshevism.

Now that the Nazis had won this great electoral success the question arose, what use were they going to make of it. Hitler gave part of an answer in a speech he made at Munich ten days after the election: '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. . . . And so this victory that 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.'[1]

This was quite in accord with what Hitler had said before the elections: 'It is not parliamentary majorities that mould the fate of nations. We know, however, that in this election democracy must be defeated with the weapons of democracy.'[2] What Hitler's speech failed to make clear was how far he meant to go with these tactics of legality; whether he meant to use the Nazi faction in the Reichstag to discredit democratic institutions and bring government to a standstill, following this with a seizure of power by force; or whether he intended to come to power legally as a result of success in the elections and postpone any revolutionary action until after he had secured control of the machinery of the State.

Almost certainly it was the second of these alternatives which Hitler had in mind. Hitler meant to have his revolution, but he meant to have it after, not before, he came to power. He was too impressed by the power of the State to risk defeat in the streets, as he had, against his better judgement, in November 1923. The revolutionary romanticism of the barricades was out of date; it had ceased to be plausible since the invention of the machine-gun. Hitler's aim now – as it had been in 1923 – was a revolution with the power of the State on his side. But revolution was not the means of securing such power; that had to be obtained legally.

There were several reasons, however, why Hitler was unwilling to say this too openly. He had to consider the effect such a declaration might have on his own Party. For many were attracted to the Party by the promise of violence. They thought in terms of a March on Berlin and the seizure of power by an act of force, and they only tolerated Hitler's talk of legality because they thought it was a camouflage behind which the real plans for a putsch could be prepared with great immunity. At the same time, his greatest asset in persuading those who controlled access to power – the Army commanders, for instance, and the President's advisers – to bring him in, was their fear that he would seize power by force if his terms were not met peacefully. To repudiate revolution altogether was to throw away his best chance of coming to

1. Baynes: vol. I, pp. 188–90, quoting the *Frankfurter Zeitung* for 26 September 1930.
2. Hitler at Munich, 18 July 1930. (Prange: p. 42).

power legally. Finally, Hitler had always to reckon with the possibility that, if the tactics of legality failed, he might be faced with the alternatives of political decline or making a putsch in earnest. It was a gamble which Hitler would always be reluctant to make, but one which, in desperation, he might be forced to take. Meanwhile the attitude of the average Party member was probably best summed up by Göring when he said: 'We are fighting against this State and the present System because we wish to destroy it utterly, but in a legal manner – for the long-eared plain-clothes men. Before we had the Law for the Protection of the Republic we said we hated this State; under this law we say we love it – and still everyone knows what we mean.'[1]

Two particular problems were bound up with the question of legality which recur throughout the history of the National Socialist movement up to 1934, the relations of the Nazi Party and the Army, and the role to be played by the brown-shirted S.A. The two questions are in fact only different sides of the same penny, but it will be easier to deal with them separately.

Since Röhm's resignation the relations between the Nazis and the Army had been bad. In an effort to keep control over the S.A., Hitler had forbidden them to have any connexion with the Army, and the Ministry of Defence had retorted by forbidding the Army to accept National Socialists as recruits or to employ them in arsenals and supply depots, 'since the Party has set itself the aim of overthrowing the constitutional State form of the German Reich'. This was in 1927.

Yet Hitler was very much aware that the support, or at least the neutrality, of the Army was the essential key to his success – as it had been in 1923. In March 1929, he delivered a speech at Munich on the subject of National Socialism and the Armed Forces which was in the nature both of a challenge to the Army and of a bid for its favour. Hitler began by attacking the idea which General von Seeckt had made the guiding principle of the new Army – that the Army must stand apart from politics. This, Hitler declared, was simply to put the Army at the service of the Republican régime, which had stabbed the old Army in the back in 1918 and betrayed Germany to her enemies.

There is another State in which the Army had a different conception of these needs. That was in the State where, in October 1922, a group made

1. Kempner: p. 121.

ready to take the reins of the State out of the hands of the gangsters, and the Italian Army did not say: 'Our only job is to protect peace and order.' Instead they said: 'It is our task to preserve the future for the Italian people.' And the future does not lie with the parties of destruction, but rather with the parties who carry in themselves the strength of the people, who are prepared and who wish to bind themselves to this Army, in order to aid the Army some day in defending the interests of the people. In contrast we still see the officers of our Army belatedly tormenting themselves with the question as to how far one can go along with Social-Democracy. But, my dear sirs, do you really believe that you have anything in common with an ideology which stipulates the dissolution of all that which is the basis of the existence of an army? . . .

The victory of one course or the other lies partially in the hands of the Army – that is, the victory of the Marxists or of our side. Should the Leftists win out through your wonderful un-political attitude, you may write over the German Army: 'The end of the German Army.' For then, gentlemen, you must definitely become political, then the red cap of the Jacobins will be drawn over your heads. . . . You may then become hangmen of the régime and political commissars, and, if you do not behave, your wife and child will be put behind locked doors. And if you still do not behave, you will be thrown out and perhaps stood up against a wall, for a human life counts little to those who are out to destroy a people.[1]

Hitler's speech was published verbatim in a special Army issue of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and Hitler followed it up by articles in a new Nazi monthly, the *Deutscher Wehrgeist* (The German Military Spirit), in which he argued that by its attitude of hostility towards nationalist movements like the Nazis the Army was betraying its own traditions and cutting the ground away from under its own feet. Hitler's arguments, which showed again his uncanny skill in penetrating the minds of those he sought to influence, were not without effect, especially among the younger officers, who saw little prospect of promotion in an army limited by the Treaty to a hundred thousand men, and who were attracted by Hitler's promises that he would at once expand and restore the Army to its old position in the State if he came to power.

The success of this Nazi campaign to win over opinion in the Army was shown in 1930 at the trial of Lieutenants Scheringer, Ludin, and Wendt before the Supreme Tribunal at Leipzig. In November 1929, Scheringer and Ludin, who were officers of the Ulm garrison, had gone to Munich and there got into touch with a number of Nazi leaders, including Captain von Pfeffer, the

1. Hitler's speech, delivered on 15 March 1929, is quoted at length in Kempner: pp. 99–105.

chief of the S.A. They had undertaken to bring as many other officers as they could into sympathy with the Nazi point of view and had subsequently travelled to Hanover and Berlin on this business. To Lieutenants Wintzer and Lorenz, whom he met at Hanover, Ludin declared that the Army must be prevented from running into a conflict with Hitler like that of 1923. The Nazis would not enter into anything if they knew the Army would oppose them, and the Army must be prevented from taking up such an attitude of opposition. The important thing was to find a few officers in each military district who could be relied on.

Shortly afterwards, in February 1930, Scheringer, Ludin, and Wendt were arrested and charged with spreading Nazi propaganda in the Army. General Groener, the Minister of Defence, tried to treat the matter as a simple breach of discipline, but was compelled by the attitude of the accused to let the case go before the Supreme Court at Leipzig. Groener was criticized for this by General von Seeckt himself and by other senior officers; Seeckt accused him of weakening the spirit of comradeship and solidarity within the Officer Corps, a revealing comment.

By the time the trial opened, on 23 September, Hitler had become the leader of the second most powerful Party in the country, and the Army leaders were extremely interested to discover what his attitude towards the Army would be. On 25 September Hans Frank, the Nazi defence lawyer, introduced Hitler as a witness. Hitler did not miss his opportunity, and every one of his statements was made with an eye to its effect, not on the Court, but on the Army. He went out of his way to reassure them about the S.A. Stormtroops. 'They were set up exclusively for the purpose of protecting the Party in its propaganda, not to fight against the State. I have been a soldier long enough to know that it is impossible for a Party Organization to fight against the disciplined forces of the Army. . . . I did everything I could to prevent the S.A. from assuming any kind of military character. I have always expressed the opinion that any attempt to replace the Army would be senseless. We are none of us interested in replacing the Army; my only wish is that the German State and the German people should be imbued with a new spirit.'[1]

For the same reason, he insisted, 'I have always held the view that every attempt to disintegrate the Army was madness. None of us have any interest in such disintegration.' In view of the

1. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 26 September 1930.

evidence before the Court this was a barefaced lie, but Hitler carried it off with assurance: 'We will see to it that, when we have come to power, out of the present Reichswehr a great German People's Army shall arise. There are thousands of young men in the Army of the same opinion.'

The President of the Court here interrupted to remark that the Nazis could scarcely hope to realize these ideals by legal means. Hitler indignantly denied this. There were no secret directives. 'On questions of this kind only my orders are valid and my basic principle is that if a Party regulation conflicts with the law it is not to be carried out. I am even now punishing failure to comply with my orders. Many Party members have been expelled for this reason; among them Otto Strasser, who toyed with the idea of revolution.'

All this was meant for the generals, but there was also the Party to be considered, and Hitler added, with sinister ambiguity: 'I can assure you that, when the Nazi movement's struggle is successful, then there will be a Nazi Court of Justice too, the November 1918 revolution will be avenged, and heads will roll.' At this there were loud cheers from the gallery.

What then, asked the President, did Hitler mean by the expression, the German National Revolution?

It should always be considered [Hitler blandly replied] in a purely political sense. For the Nazis it means simply an uprising of the oppressed German people. . . . Our movement represents such an uprising, but it does not need to prepare it by illegal means. . . . Our propaganda is the spiritual revolutionizing of the German people. Our movement has no need of force. The time will come when the German nation will get to know of our ideas; then thirty-five million Germans will stand behind me. . . . We will enter the legal organizations and will make our Party a decisive factor in this way. But when we do possess constitutional rights, then we will form the State in the manner which we consider to be the right one.

THE PRESIDENT: This, too, by constitutional means.

HITLER: Yes.[1]

When General Jodl was examined at Nuremberg after the war he told the Tribunal that he had not been reassured until Hitler, during the Leipzig Trial, gave the assurance that he was opposed to any disorganization of the Reichswehr.[2] There is, indeed, little

1. *Frankfurter Zeitung.*

2. *Proceedings of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg*, part XV, pp. 276–7.

doubt that it was Hitler's explicit statement at Leipzig, coming immediately after his success in the elections, which provided the basis for his subsequent negotiations with the Army leaders and their eventual agreement to his assumption of power.

Hitler's talk of legality, however, was only a half-truth, a trick to get power on the cheap, to persuade the generals and the other guardians of the State to hand over power without forcing him to seize it. They were only tactics of legality, for everything about the movement proclaimed its brazen contempt for law. Hitler had therefore to take care that in his preoccupation with tactics he did not so far compromise the revolutionary character of his movement as to rob it of its attractive power. The possibility of such a danger was illustrated by the subsequent history of Lieutenant Scheringer, who, after being condemned to eighteen months' imprisonment, went over to the Communists while still in prison. When Goebbels telegraphed to ask if the letter which a Communist deputy had read in the Reichstag was genuine, Scheringer wired back: 'Declaration authentic. Hitler revolution betrayed.' If many others were to follow Scheringer – or Otto Strasser – Hitler would be in a difficult position.

The danger point was the S.A., which was to become, between 1930 and the summer of 1934, the expression of the Party's revolutionary purpose. One of the favourite S.A slogans was: 'Possession of the streets is the key to power in the State,' and from the beginning of 1930 the political struggle in the Reichstag and at elections was supplemented – in part replaced – by the street fights of the Party armies in Berlin and the other big cities of Germany.

In the course of one of these gang feuds in February 1930, a young Berlin S.A. leader, Horst Wessel, was shot by the Communists, and was skilfully built up by Goebbels into the prototype of the martyred Nazi idealist, whose verses provided the S.A. with their marching song, the famous *Horst Wessel Lied.* In the first six months of 1930 the authorities issued a number of prohibitions to check this growth of public disorder. Outdoor meetings and parades were forbidden in Prussia (16 January); a new Law for the Protection of the Republic and for the suppression of political disturbances was passed by the Reichstag in March; in June the Prussian Minister of the Interior prohibited the Nazis from wearing uniforms and emblems. But these measures proved ineffective; forbidden to wear their brown shirts, the

Nazis paraded in white. Night after night they and the Communists marched in formation singing down the streets, broke up rival political meetings, beat up opponents, and raided each other's 'territory'. As the unemployment figures rose, the number of recruits mounted. Anything was better than loafing on the street corners, and the S.A. offered a meal and a uniform, companionship and something exciting to do.

In July 1930, one of the Nazi deputies, Wagner, summed up the character of the Nazi campaign in one sentence, when he said: 'The N.S.D.A.P. will not let the people rest in peace until they have obtained power.' The key to this campaign was incessant activity, a sustained effort of propaganda and agitation not limited to elections, but kept up all the year round. In this the S.A. had an essential part to play, for violence and the display of force had always formed a central part of Nazi propaganda. But it was propaganda that Hitler had in mind; the S.A. were to be the shock troops of a revolution that was never to be made. Hitler's problem was to keep the spirit of the S.A. alive without allowing it to find an outlet in revolutionary action; to use them as a threat of civil war, yet never to let them get so far out of hand as to compromise his plan of coming to power without a head-on collision with the forces of the State, above all with the Army.

Just before the elections of September 1930 the Berlin S.A. mutinied and smashed up the Berlin headquarters of the Party. Their real grievance was their pay, but undercurrents of discontent against the Party leadership also came to the surface. Goebbels proved incapable of handling the situation – he had actually to ask for police protection to get the Brown Shirts out of headquarters – and Hitler had to intervene personally. He levied a special tax for the S.A. on the whole Party, came at once to Berlin and drove round one beer-hall after another, appealing to the Stormtroopers, promising them better pay, telling them the Party was on the eve of great victories, and assuring them that in future bad leaders (on whom he threw the blame) would not be allowed to come between him and the faithful rank-and-file. At the end of an exhausting night Hitler had restored his authority; he promptly took the opportunity to retire Captain von Pfeffer, and on 2 September himself assumed the position of Oberster S.A. Führer – Supreme S.A. Leader.

In the electoral successes that followed, the incident was soon forgotten – not, however, by Hitler. The following month,

October, he persuaded Ernst Röhm, then serving as an officer in the Bolivian Army, to leave South America and return to Germany, to take over the reorganization of the S.A. as its Chief of Staff. In Röhm, he hoped, he had found the man to pull the S.A. together and keep it in hand.

Despite these troubles, as the year 1930 came to an end Hitler had considerable cause for satisfaction. Party membership was rising towards the four hundred thousand figure; a vote of more than six millions at the elections had raised the Nazi strength in the Reichstag to 107. When the swastika flag was hoisted over the Brown House on 1 January 1931 he could feel he had already covered the most difficult part of the road; there was no danger now that people would not pay attention to the unknown man of the 1920s. In the Reichstag the Nazis – every man in brown uniform – had already shown their strength and their contempt for Parliament by creating such disorder that the sittings had to be frequently suspended. In the streets the S.A. had scored another triumph by forcing the Government to ban the further showing of the anti-militarist film, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, by calculated hooliganism.

Hitler was in no danger of underestimating the opposition to his leadership which still existed in the Party. Failure or setbacks would bring it quickly to the surface; success alone would silence criticism. Yet success no longer seemed impossible. This was the measure of his achievement in 1930. He had reached the threshold of power.

VIII

At the beginning of January 1931, Röhm took over his new duties as Chief of Staff of the S.A. He immediately set to work to make the S.A. by far the most efficient of the Party armies. The whole of Germany was divided into twenty-one districts, with an S.A. Group in each under the command of an Obergruppenführer. The organization was closely modelled on that of the Army, with its own headquarters and General Staff quite separate from the organization of the Party, and its own training college for S.A. and S.S. leaders opened at Munich in June 1931.

Since 1929 Himmler had been Reichsführer of the S.S., but he too was now brought under Röhm, although the S.S. with its distinctive black uniform and death's head badge retained its

separate identity. Another of Röhm's auxiliaries was the N.S.K.K. – the Nazi Motor Corps – a flying squad under the command of Major Hühnlein. At the time Röhm took over, in January 1931, the S.A. numbered roughly a hundred thousand men; a year later Hitler could claim three hundred thousand.

The Party Organization itself, designed by Gregor Strasser, also followed a highly centralized pattern, subject to the will of the Party chairman and leader, Hitler. The basis of this organization was the Gau and the Gauleiter, each Gau in turn being divided and subdivided down to the lowest unit, the Cell, corresponding to the S.A. squad. The central directorate of the Party was still in Munich, where special departments sprang up and multiplied rapidly, among them the Factory Cell Organization (N.S. Betriebszellen-Organisation), under Walther Schumann; the Economic Policy Department, run by Otto Wagener; and the pension fund (*Hilfskasse*), administered by Martin Bormann, to aid the families of those killed or disabled in the Party's fight.[1]

The direction of the Party in the years 1931 and 1932 was for all practical purposes in the hands of six men – Hitler himself, Röhm, Gregor Strasser, Göring, Goebbels, and Frick. Röhm's importance consisted not only in his talents as an organizer and his office as Chief of Staff of the S.A., but also in his contacts with the Army. Göring, with his wide range of acquaintances, his good-humoured charm and ease of manner, became in the course of 1931 Hitler's chief political 'contact-man' in the capital, with a general commission to negotiate with other parties and groups.[2] The following year he was Hitler's choice for the Presidency of the Reichstag when this office fell to the Nazis as the strongest Party. From the end of August 1932, when he was elected, to Hitler's appointment as Chancellor, the Reichstag President's palace opposite the Reichstag was the centre from which the Party's manoeuvres and intrigues were directed.

The leader of the Nazi Party in the Reichstag – and the first Nazi Minister to hold office (in Thuringia) – was Dr Wilhelm Frick, by profession a civil servant, and in 1919–23 one of Hitler's protectors in the Munich police. An early and convinced National Socialist, although one of the less colourful of the Nazi leaders, he was useful to Hitler as a good administrator and a man who knew thoroughly the machinery and the mentality of the German civil service.

1. For the departments already established, cf. above, p. 141.
2. cf. Göring's evidence at Nuremberg, N.P. IX, p. 68.

The remaining two had been enemies ever since Goebbels's desertion of Strasser after the Bamberg meeting in 1926. Both were able speakers, and both held high office in the Party, Goebbels as Propaganda Director and Gauleiter of Berlin, Strasser at the head of the Political Organization, with powerful influence among the Gauleiters and local branches. How far Hitler trusted Strasser may well be questioned, but Strasser was undoubtedly the most powerful of Hitler's lieutenants, the only man in the Party who, if he had had more of Hitler's power of will and ambition, and less good-natured easy-going Bavarian indulgence in his nature, might have challenged Hitler's leadership. Strasser possessed the personality to be a leader in his own right if he bestirred himself; Goebbels, undersized, lame and much disliked for his malicious tongue, could rise only under the aegis of someone like Hitler, to whom he was useful for his abounding energy and fertility of ideas, apt at times to be too clever and to over-reach himself, but exploiting with brassy impudence every trick of propaganda.

There were others – Darré, the agricultural and peasant expert; Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth; Hess, the Führer's inseparable secretary; Wilhelm Brückner, his personal adjutant; Max Amann, the Party's publisher; Franz Xavier Schwarz, the fat, bald Party treasurer; Philipp Bouhler, the Party's young business manager; Hans Frank, the Party's legal expert; and Otto Dietrich, its Press chief. But none of these held anything like the position of Röhm and Strasser, Göring and Goebbels, or even Frick, the five men with whom Hitler captured power.

It is obvious that so highly organized a machine must have cost large sums of money to run. 'When I visited Berlin before we came to power,' Hitler recalled later, 'I used to stay at the Kaiserhof; and as I was always accompanied by a complete general staff, I generally had to book a whole floor and our bill for food and lodging usually came to about 10,000 marks a week. I earned enough to defray these costs mostly by means of interviews and articles for the foreign press. Towards the end of the *Kampfzeit*, I was being paid as much as two or three thousand dollars a time for such work.'[1] This was Hanfstängl's job as Foreign Press Chief, to place Hitler's articles and arrange interviews with him.

A good deal of money, of course, came from the Party itself –

1. *Hitler's Table Talk*, 6 July 1942, p. 564.

from membership dues; from the sale of Party newspapers and literature, which members were always being pressed to buy; from the admission charges and collections at the big meetings. There is no doubt that the Party made heavy demands on its members – even the unemployed S.A. men had to hand over their unemployment-benefit money in return for their food and shelter. Almost certainly the proportion of revenue which was raised by the Party itself has been underestimated. But there were also subsidies from interested supporters.

Some light on the means by which these subsidies were obtained is thrown by the interrogation of Walther Funk at Nuremberg after the war. Funk, a shifty, unimpressive little man who was later to succeed Schacht as President of the Reichsbank and Minister of economics, had been editor-in-chief of the *Berliner Börsen-Zeitung*, a leading financial newspaper, in the 1920s. In 1931 he gave up his post as editor and began to act as a 'contact-man' between the Nazi Party and certain industrial and business interests. For a time he ran the *Wirtschaftspolitischer Pressedienst*, an economic Press and Information Service controlled by Dr Wagener, the head of the Nazi Party's Economic Policy Department. There were no more than sixty subscribers to this agency, but according to Funk 'they paid very well'. In return Funk was expected to influence the Party's economic policy and to persuade Hitler to repudiate the anti-capitalist views of men like Gottfried Feder. 'At that time,' Funk says, 'the leadership of the Party held completely contradictory and confused views on economic policy. I tried to accomplish my mission by impressing on the Führer and the Party as a whole that private initiative, the self-reliance of the business man, and the creative powers of free enterprise should be recognized as the basic economic policy of the Party. The Führer personally stressed time and again, during talks with me and industrial leaders to whom I had introduced him, that he was an enemy of state-economy and of so-called "planned economy", and that he considered free enterprise and competition as absolutely necessary in order to gain the highest possible production.'[1]

An illustration of the consequences of the new contacts which Hitler was now making is given by an incident which took place in the autumn of 1930. On 14 October the Nazi Party in the Reichstag introduced a bill to limit rates of interest to four per cent; to expropriate the entire property of 'the bank and stock-exchange

1. Nuremberg Document (N.D.) EC-440: Statement by Walther Funk.

magnates', and of all Eastern Jews without compensation; and to nationalize the big banks. This was the work of Gregor Strasser, Feder, and Frick. Hitler at once intervened and forced them to withdraw the motion. When the Communists reintroduced the Bill in the exact wording the Nazis had used, he compelled the Party to vote against it. If Hitler intended to impress Funk's friends, there was no room for such bills in the Party's programme. On the other hand, Funk found Hitler very reserved about the policy he would himself adopt once in power. 'I cannot', Hitler told him, 'commit myself to an economic policy at present; the views expressed by my economic theorists, such as Gottfried Feder, are not necessarily mine.'[1] Hitler, in short, while anxious to keep the industrialists friendly, declined to tie his own hands, and he very largely succeeded. As Funk admits: 'My industrial friends and I were convinced in those days that the N.S.D.A.P. would come to power in the not too distant future and that this *had* to be, if Communism and civil war were to be avoided.'[2]

Only a section of German industry and big business was willing to support Hitler and the Nazis at this time. Funk says specifically that the greater part of industry's political funds still went to the German National Party, the Democrats, and the People's Party. The main support for the Nazis came from a powerful group of coal and steel producers in the Rhineland and Westphalia. In addition to Emil Kirdorf, the biggest figure in the Ruhr coal industry, Fritz Thyssen and Albert Voegler of the United Steel Works, Funk mentions Friedrich Springorum and Tengelmann, Ernest Buskühl and H. G. Knepper of the Gelsenkirchen Mine Company. Among bankers and financiers who, according to Funk, met Hitler in 1931–2 and, in some cases at least, helped him, were Stein and Schröder of the Stein Bank in Cologne; E. G. von Stauss, of the Deutsche Bank; Hilgard, of the Allianz Insurance Corporation; and two more bankers, Otto Christian Fischer and Fr. Reinhart.

Funk's list is haphazard and is obviously not comprehensive. None the less, it gives some interesting clues to the sort of men Hitler was beginning to meet and who were now interested to meet him, even if these encounters did not always lead to such direct financial aid as in the case of Thyssen. Besides the names already mentioned, Funk adds the potash industry led by August Rosterg of Kassel, and August Diehn; shipping circles in Ham-

1. N.P., XIII, p. 100 (Funk's evidence).
2. N.D. EC-440.

burg, of whom the most important was Cuno, of the Hamburg-Amerika Line; Otto Wolf, a big Cologne industrialist and business man who was friendly with Robert Ley, the local Gauleiter; the brown coal industry of Central Germany – Deutsches Erdöl, Brabag, and the Anhaltische Kohlenwerke; and Dr Erich Lubbert of the A.G. für Verkehrswesen and the Baugesellschaft Lenz.

There were, of course, others besides Funk who were interested in bringing together Hitler and the men with money and influence. When Dr Schacht, the ex-President of the Reichsbank, first met Hitler in January, 1931, it was at Göring's flat, where he and Fritz Thyssen spent an evening listening to Hitler talking. Göring was particularly active in arranging such meetings; so was the Graf von Helldorf, who became the S.A. leader in Berlin. Grauert, an influential figure in Düsseldorf as manager of the Employers' Association in the Rhineland and Westphalia, with its large funds for strike-breaking, used his position to help the Nazi cause, and was later rewarded with the post of Göring's Under-Secretary in the Prussian Ministry of the Interior. Wilhelm Keppler, another who aspired to be Hitler's economic adviser, had wide connexions, was friendly with Schröder, the Cologne banker, and founded Himmler's private circle known by the pleasing name of *Freundeskreis der Wirtschaft*, literally 'Friends of the Economy'. Otto Dietrich, the young journalist who introduced Hitler to Kirdorf and who became the Party's Press chief, writes in his memoirs 'In the summer of 1931 our Führer suddenly decided to concentrate systematically on cultivating the influential economic magnates. . . . In the following months he traversed Germany from end to end, holding private interviews with prominent personalities. Any rendezvous was chosen, either in Berlin or in the provinces, in the Hotel Kaiserhof or in some lonely forest-glade. Privacy was absolutely imperative, the Press must have no chance of doing mischief. Success was the consequence.'[1]

How much all this produced in hard cash it is impossible to say. Funk mentions three figures. In his interrogation at Nuremberg[2] he said that during the elections of 1932, when the Party was short of money, he asked directly for money: 'in three or four cases where direct intervention was sought, the total was approximately

1. Otto Dietrich: *Mit Hitler in die Macht*; English translation, *With Hitler on the Road to Power* (London, 1934), pp. 12–13.
2. Dated 4 June and 26 June 1945: N.D. 2828-PS.

half a million marks.' The second figure he gives is for the contributions of the important Rhenish-Westphalian group in 1931–32: during that period, he states in his affidavit, they did not amount to one million marks.[1] Finally, when he was asked to give a global figure for the support Hitler received from industry in the period before he became Chancellor, Funk answered: 'In contrast to other parties, I don't think that it was much more than a couple of million marks.'[2]

Thyssen's memoirs, despite their title – *I Paid Hitler*[3] – are disappointing, and add little to Funk's evidence. Thyssen joined the Party openly in December 1931, and was responsible for the best-known of all Hitler's meetings with industrialists, when he spoke to the Industry Club at Düsseldorf in January 1932.[4] 'I have,' he writes, 'personally given altogether one million marks to the Nazi Party. . . . It was during the last years preceding the Nazi seizure of power that the big industrial corporations began to make their contributions. But they did not give directly to Hitler; they gave them direct to Dr Alfred Hugenberg, the leader of the Nationalists, who placed at the disposal of the Nazi Party about one-fifth of the amounts given. All in all, the amounts given by heavy industry to the Nazis may be estimated at two million marks a year.'[5] Unfortunately, it is not clear to what period Thyssen is referring.

Beyond such tantalizing and imprecise figures it is not yet possible to go. But it is easy to exaggerate the importance of these outside subventions, for the most important point of all is that Hitler, however much he received from Kirdorf, Thyssen, and the rest, was neither a political puppet created by the capitalists, nor a mere agent of the big industrialists who had lost his independence. Thyssen's and Schacht's accounts are there as records of the disillusionment of those who thought they had bought Hitler and would henceforward call the tune he was to play. They were to discover, like the conservative politicians and the generals, that, contrary to the popular belief, bankers and business men are too innocent for politics when the game is played by a man like Hitler.

1. N.D. EC-440. 2. N.D. 2828-PS.
3. Fritz Thyssen: *I Paid Hitler* (London, 1941).
4. See below, pp. 196–9. 5. Thyssen: pp. 133–4.

IX

In speaking of the Nazi movement as a 'party' there is a danger of mistaking its true character. For the Nazi Party was no more a party, in the normal democratic sense of that word, than the Communist Party is today; it was an organized conspiracy against the State. The Party's programme was important to win support, and, for psychological reasons which Hitler discussed quite frankly in *Mein Kampf*, the programme had to be kept unalterable and never allowed to become a subject for discussion. But the attitude of the leaders towards the programme was entirely opportunist. For them, as for most of the old Party members, the real object was to get their hands on the State. They were the Catilines of a new revolution, the gutter élite, avid for power, position, and wealth; the sole object of the Party was to secure power by one means or another.

The existence of such an organization was in fact incompatible with the safety of the Republic. No State could tolerate the threat which it implied, if it was resolved to remain master in its own house. Why then were no effective steps taken by the German Government to arrest the leaders of the Nazi Party and break up their organization? As Dr Kempner has shown, recommendations to this effect, with legal grounds for the action proposed, were submitted by the police authorities to the Reich Attorney-General even before the Nazis' electoral triumph of September 1930.[1] Yet no action was taken.

In the case of Dr Kempner's police report, the Reich Attorney-General was a crypto-Nazi who used his office to prevent any action being taken. This in itself is a significant enough sidelight on the state of affairs in Germany in 1930–3, but it is not a sufficient answer to the more general question. If the people in authority in Germany at this time had been really determined to smash the Nazi movement they would have found the means. The question to be asked is, why they lacked the will and the determination. To this there are not one, but several, answers.

In the first place, Hitler's tactics of legality were designed to

1. The full text of the Police Report prepared by Dr Kempner in the Police Division of the Prussian Ministry of the Interior in 1930 has been reprinted by him in *Research Studies of the State College of Washington* (vol. XIII, No. 2, June 1945), pp. 56–130. It is accompanied by his correspondence with the Reich Attorney-General, pp. 131–4.

enable him to win the maximum advantage from the democratic constitution of the Weimar Republic. Thereby he avoided giving his opponents the chance of shifting the fight for power on to a level where the Army would be the decisive factor. As Hitler was shrewd enough to realize, he would be the loser, not the gainer, in any attempt to resort to force, whereas so long as he kept within the letter of the law he could fetter the authorities with their own slow-moving legal processes.

In May 1931, four National Socialists were brought for trial after a shooting affair with some Communists. Hitler was called upon to give evidence. 'I have never left any doubt,' he declared, 'that I demanded from the S.A. men the strict observance of the path of legality, and, if this veto on illegality was anywhere violated, then the leaders concerned have always been brought to account. . . . Acts of violence have never been contemplated by our Party, nor has the individual S.A. man ever wished for them. . . . We stand absolutely as hard as granite on the ground of legality.'[1] In December 1931, Hitler again underlined the importance he attached to keeping within the law by a proclamation to the S.A. and S.S. in which he assured them that victory was certain, if they remained true to the policy of legality. They were not to allow themselves to be provoked. 'He who fails in the last days of his test is not worthy to witness victory.'[2]

In the second place, so long as the challenge to the authority of the State remained latent and was camouflaged by fair words, there was a strong temptation for any government in Germany in 1931 and 1932 not to add to its difficulties. For throughout the winter of 1930–1 the economic crisis, far from lifting, bore down more heavily upon the German people. The figures for registered unemployment, which, in September 1930 had stood at three millions, mounted to four and three-quarter millions at the end of March 1931. The financial crisis reached its peak in July 1931, when, following the failure of Austria's greatest banking institution the Kreditanstalt, and an unprecedented flight of capital from Germany, the Darmstadt and National Bank (the Danat), one of the big three joint-stock banks in Germany, had to close its doors and suspend payment. When the British Ambassador returned to Berlin on 16 July he wrote: 'I was much struck by the emptiness of the streets and the unnatural silence hanging

1. 8 May 1931, (Baynes: vol. I, pp. 163–4).
2. ibid.: vol. I, p. 178, quoting the *Frankfurter Zeitung* for 3 December 1931.

over the city, and particularly by an atmosphere of extreme tension similar in many respects to that which I observed in Berlin in the critical days immediately preceding the war.'[1]

With help from abroad the threat of financial collapse was staved off, but the measures taken by the Brüning Government – heavy additional taxation, cuts in official salaries and wage rates, the reduction of unemployment benefits – while imposing considerable sacrifices on the people, were insufficient to enable the Government to master the crisis. In such circumstances Hitler found no difficulty in laying the blame for all the economic distress of the country on the Government's policy, particularly as Germany was still saddled with reparation payments, and the worsening of the crisis in the summer of 1931 had been partly occasioned by a stinging rebuff in foreign policy.

In March 1931, the German Foreign Minister, in an effort to alleviate the effects of the slump in Central Europe, put forward the proposal of an Austro-German Customs Union. Whatever the economic arguments in favour of such a step, France, supported by Italy and Czechoslovakia, had taken this to be a move towards the political and territorial union of Austria with Germany which was expressly forbidden by the Treaties of Versailles and St Germain. She had promptly mobilized her financial as well as her diplomatic resources to prevent it. The measures taken by the French proved effective: they not only helped to precipitate the failure of the Austrian Kreditanstalt and the German financial crisis of the summer but forced the German Foreign Minister to announce on 3 September that the project was being abandoned. The result was to inflict a sharp humiliation on the Brüning Government and to inflame national resentment in Germany.

Hitler was not slow to point the lesson: so long as Germany continued to be ruled by the present system she would continue to suffer economic misery at home and contemptuous insults abroad. Two years before Gregor Strasser had written in the *Nationalsozialistische Briefe:* 'Everything that is detrimental to the existing order has our support. . . . We are promoting catastrophic policies – for only catastrophe, that is, the collapse of the liberal system, will clear the way for the new order. . . . All that serves to precipitate the catastrophe of the ruling system – every strike, every governmental crisis, every disturbance of the State power, every weakening of the System – is good, very good for us

1. *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, 2nd series, vol. II, No. 225.

and our German revolution.'[1] The Nazis were now beginning to garner the harvest of their policy of catastrophe.

Faced with such difficulties, both in domestic and foreign policy, any government was likely to hesitate before adding to its problems by the uproar which the suppression of the Nazi Party, the second largest in the Reichstag, would inevitably have entailed, so long as Hitler was clever enough to avoid any flagrant act of illegality. For the Brüning Ministry lacked the support to play the role of a strong government. The Chancellor's appeal for national unity had failed, and the elections of September 1930, far from producing a stable parliamentary basis for Brüning's policy, had only multiplied the strength of the two extremist parties, the Nazis and the Communists. Brüning was only able to continue governing Germany after the elections because the Social Democrats, alarmed at the growing political and economic crisis, gave him unofficial support in the Reichstag, and the President of the Republic continued to use his emergency powers under Article 48 to sign the necessary decrees. The refusal of the German parties to sink their differences, unite in face of the emergency, and jointly assume responsibility for the unpopular measures which had to be taken, drove Brüning into a dangerous dependence on support outside the Reichstag, upon the support of the President and the support of the Army. The attitude of both towards the Nazis was equivocal. Here was the third reason for the reluctance to take action against the Nazis.

From the beginning of 1930, General Groener, the Minister of Defence, a man of integrity and experience, had been uneasily conscious that a good many members of the Officer Corps were becoming sympathetic to the Nazis. The Leipzig Trial of Lieutenants Ludin and Scheringer, and the storm of criticism to which he had been subjected for allowing the trial to take place at all, showed that Hitler's propaganda directed at the Army had been far from unsuccessful. After the elections of September 1930, the British Military Attaché reported that the officers he had met on the autumn manoeuvres were deeply impressed by the growth of National Socialism. 'It is the *Jugendbewegung* (Youth Movement),' they said; 'it can't be stopped.'[2] Professor Meinecke records that the attitude of Army officers was summed up in the

1. *N.S. Briefe*, No. 23, June 1929, quoted in the Police Report of 1930, Kempner: pp. 97–8.
2. *Brit. Doc.*, 2nd series, vol. I, p. 512, note.

phrase: 'What a pity it would be to have to fire on these splendid youths in the S.A.'[1] The nationalist appeal of Nazi propaganda and its promise of a powerful Germany with an expanded Army were beginning to have their effect.

The Army could still be relied on to support Brüning if Hitler attempted to make a putsch. 'It is a complete mistake to ask where the Army stands,' Groener told his friend, Meinecke. 'The army will do what it is ordered to do, *und damit Basta* – and that's that.'[2] To General von Gleich, Groener wrote that, if Hitler resorted to force, he would meet 'the unqualified employment of the resources of the State. The Army is so completely in our hands that it will never hesitate in this eventuality'.[3] In an article published since the war Dr Brüning confirms this. In the autumn of 1931 he writes: 'the two generals (von Schleicher and von Hammerstein) and myself were fully agreed that, if the Nazis imitated Mussolini's March on Rome the Army would make short work of them. . . . We also expected that we would finally get Hindenburg's consent to the immediate suppression of the Nazi Party, if they resorted to open revolt.'[4]

But it was not at all certain that the Government would be able to count on the support of the Army if it was a question of suppressing the Nazi Party without the pretext of revolt. Once again the cleverness of Hitler's tactics of legality was demonstrated. Groener, who never wavered in his dislike and contempt for Nazism, hesitated to take action against the Party, even after he had become Minister of the Interior as well as Minister of Defence (October 1931). Later he admitted to Meinecke: 'We ought to have suppressed them by force.'[5] But at the time Groener was too unsure of feeling in the Army to risk action, at least until Brüning should have secured the agreement of the other Powers to the creation of a German conscript militia, which would reassure those officers who looked to the S.A. as an Army reserve in

1. Friedrich Meinecke: *Die deutsche Katastrophe* (Wiesbaden, 1947), p. 71.

2. Meinecke: pp. 68–9.

3. Groener Correspondence, 26 January 1932, quoted by Gordon A. Craig: 'The Reichswehr and National Socialism', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. LXIII, No. 2 (June 1948), p. 210.

4. Heinrich Brüning: 'Ein Brief', in *Deutsche Rundschau*, July 1947. This post-war account by Dr Brüning should be compared with the version of events given in J. W. Wheeler-Bennett: *Hindenburg, The Wooden Titan* (London, 1936), which is partly based on the author's conversations with Brüning at that time.

5. Meinecke: p. 74.

case of war, and draw away the young men attracted by the militarist propaganda of the Nazis.

The President, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, was now a very old man, eighty-four in October 1931, and such political judgement as he had ever had was failing. What he cared about most of all was the German Army in which he had spent his life. Between the President and the Army there existed, as Professor Meinecke says, 'relations of mutual dependence. The Reichswehr obeyed him, but he listened to it. He absorbed into his mind and spirit everything to which it was sensitive. He was flesh and blood of its flesh and blood, an off-shoot of that Prusso-German militarism which had produced so many first-rate technical and so few politically far-sighted heads.'[1] Faithfully reflecting opinion in the Army, Hindenburg too was opposed to the use of force against the Nazis. He would only agree to it if there was some unequivocal act of rebellion on their part or if at the same time action were taken against the other extremist party the Communists.[2]

More important still than the opinion of either General Groener or President Hindenburg was that of Major-General Kurt von Schleicher, who, by 1930–2, had made himself virtually the authoritative voice of the Army in politics. General Schleicher was a General Staff Officer – able, charming, and ambitious – who was far more interested in politics and intrigue than in war. Fifteen years younger than Groener, he had risen rapidly from one Staff appointment to another until Groener became Minister of Defence in 1928 – partly thanks to Schleicher's efforts on his behalf – and made Schleicher the head of a new department in his Ministry, the Ministeramt. This was to handle all matters common to both the Army and Navy and to act as liaison between the armed services and other ministeries. Schleicher used the key position created for him to make himself one of the most powerful political figures in Germany. Both Groener and the C.-in-C. of the Army, General von Hammerstein, were under his influence. Through the fortunate chance of an old friendship with the President's son, Colonel Oskar von Hindenburg, he had an entrée to the old man, who listened and was impressed by what he said. Indeed it was Schleicher who had first proposed Brüning's name to the President in 1930 and had overcome Brüning's own objections to serving as Chancellor. In dealing with his

1. Meinecke: p. 73.
2. cf. Brüning's letter, already cited.

brother officers Schleicher had the advantage of quickness and self-confidence in political matters, where they were hesitant and diffident. In dealing with politicians he had the indefinable advantage in German politics of being a general, not a civilian, and of being able to claim that he represented the views of the Army in a country where the Army took precedence over every other institution as the supreme embodiment of the national tradition.

Schleicher's object was to secure a strong government which, in place of coalitions spending their energy in political horse-dealing and compromise, would master the economic and political crisis and prevent the Army being forced to intervene to put down revolution. He believed he had found the answer in Brüning, whose cabinet was made up of men from several parties, without being based upon a coalition, and who, with the promise of the President's emergency powers at his disposal, could follow a firm policy without having to truckle too much to the parties in the Reichstag. But the appeal Brüning made over the heads of the parties to the German people at the elections of September 1930 had failed. It was not Brüning but the two extremist parties which had won the votes, and Schleicher's anxieties revived. 'The load which constantly weighed on General Schleicher's mind', Brüning writes, 'was the fear, based on the experience of 1923, that Nazi and Communist uprisings might break out simultaneously and thus give foreign powers an opportunity to extend their borders still further at Germany's expense.'[1] In particular he feared an attack by Poland, if the German Army should be fully occupied in dealing with simultaneous Nazi and Communist risings.

Schleicher, therefore, shared fully – and was partly responsible for – the reluctance of Groener and Hindenburg to take any initiative against the Nazis. But Schleicher went further: impressed by the Nazi success at the elections and by their nationalist programme, Schleicher began to play with the idea of, somehow or other, winning Hitler's support for Brüning and converting the Nazi movement with its mass following into a prop of the existing government, instead of a battering ram directed against it. Here was an attractive alternative to that of using the Army to suppress the Nazis; it might even be possible to bring them into a coalition government in which they would be forced to share the responsibility for the unpopular measures which would have to be taken.

1. Brüning: 'Ein Brief', already cited.

It was in this direction that Schleicher began to look during 1931 for a way out of the political deadlock. It took time for his ideas to mature, but he made a beginning by removing the old causes of quarrel between the Army and the Nazi Party. The ban on the Army's employment of National Socialists in arsenals and supply depots and the prohibition of Nazi enlistment in the Army were removed in January 1931. In return Hitler reaffirmed his adherence to the policy of legality by an order (dated 20 February 1931) forbidding the S.A. to take part in street-fighting. During the succeeding months Schleicher had several talks with Röhm, eager as always to work with the Army, as well as with Gregor Strasser. By the latter half of 1931 he was ready to try to secure Hitler's agreement to Hindenburg's re-election – his seven-year term of office expired in 1932 – as a first step to drawing the Nazis into support of the Government and taming their revolutionary ardour.

Nothing could have suited Hitler better. For, a year after the great success he had won at the September elections of 1930, Hitler was still no nearer attaining office. He had built up a remarkable organization, the strength of which grew steadily, but the question remained how was he to change the success he had won into the hard coin of political power.

The two most obvious ways by which men come to supreme power in the State – apart from conquest in war – are by force, i.e. by revolution, or by consent, i.e. by an electoral majority. The first of these Hitler himself ruled out, but the second never became a practical alternative. At the height of their success in the elections of July 1932, when they won 230 out of 608 seats in the Reichstag, the Nazis were never in sight of a clear majority. Even in the elections held after Hitler had come to power, the elections of March 1933, they obtained no more than 288 out of 647 seats.

One way of adding to the Nazi vote was to combine with Hugenberg's German National Party. On 9 July 1931, Hitler and Hugenberg met in Berlin and issued a statement to the effect that they would henceforward cooperate for the overthrow of the existing 'System'. The first fruit of this alliance, which had produced the plebiscite against the Young Plan in 1929, was another plebiscite in August 1931, this time demanding a dissolution of the Diet in Prussia, by far the most important of the German states, in which power was exercised by a coalition of the hated Social Democrats and the Catholic Centre Party. Even with the

support of the Communist vote, which was flung against the rival working-class party of the Social Democrats, the two Right-wing parties, however, secured no more than thirty-seven per cent of the votes and promptly proceeded to blame each other for the failure. Alliance with the Nationalists, with their strongly upper-class character, was in fact a dubious policy for the Nazis, bound to lead to much discontent in the radical wing of the Party. Although Hitler continued to make intermittent use of the Nationalist alliance, it was with reluctance and misgivings, for limited purposes only, when no other course presented itself.

Yet the only justification of the course of legality was success. It would not be possible to hold the precarious balance between legality and illegality indefinitely. As General Groener remarked: 'Despite all the declarations of legality . . . such an organization has its dynamic in itself and cannot simply be declared now legal and now illegal.'[1] The grumbling in the S.A. at Hitler's policy again found a focus in Berlin and a revolt, which had contacts with Otto Strasser's revolutionary Black Front, was planned by Walter Stennes, a former police captain and the leader of the S.A. for the whole of Eastern Germany. An immediate grievance was Hitler's order of 20 February, ordering the S.A. to refrain from street-fights. Hitler intervened at the beginning of April 1931, before the revolt had got under way, threw out Stennes, and replaced him by one of the most notorious of Rossbach's former Freikorps men, Edmund Heines, who had already served a term of imprisonment for murder and whom Hitler himself had expelled from the Party in 1927. This was, however, the second S.A. mutiny in Berlin in seven months, and it was noticeable that Stennes, instead of making his peace with Hitler, denounced him and joined forces with Otto Strasser.

If Hitler was to carry his policy of legality to success it could only be done in one way, a possibility created by the peculiar system under which Germany was now governed. From the breakdown of the coalition headed by Herman Müller in 1930, Brüning, his successor as Chancellor, and Brüning's own successor, Papen, had both to govern without being able to find a stable parliamentary majority or to win an election. The use of the President's emergency powers, upon which they relied to issue decrees, placed great power in the hands of the President and his advisers; in effect, political power in Germany was transferred from the nation to the little group of men round the President. The most

1. Groener, in the Reichstag, 10 May 1932; Craig: op. cit., p. 212.

important members of this group were General von Schleicher; Oskar von Hindenburg; Otto Meissner, the head of the Presidential Chancery; Brüning and, after his loss of favour, Papen, Brüning's successor as Chancellor. If Hitler could persuade these men to take him into partnership and make him Chancellor, with the right to use the President's emergency powers – a presidential, as opposed to a parliamentary, government – then he could dispense with the clear electoral majority which still eluded him and with the risky experiment of a putsch.

At first sight nothing appeared more improbable than such a deal. Yet neither Schleicher nor the President was at all satisfied with the existing situation. They did not believe that the President's emergency powers could be made into a permanent basis for governing the country. They were looking for a government which, while prepared to take resolute action to deal with the crisis, would also be able to win mass support in the country, and, if possible, secure a majority in the Reichstag. Brüning had failed to win such a majority at the elections. Schleicher, therefore, began to look elsewhere for the mass support which he felt to be necessary for the presidential government.

With six million votes Hitler was a possibility worth considering. For Hitler had two assets, both of which counted with the General. The Nazi success at the elections was a promise of the support Hitler would be able to provide, if he was bought in. The organized violence of the S.A. was a threat of the revolution he might make if he were left out. Hitler's game, therefore, from 1931 to 1933 was to use the revolution he was unwilling to make and the mass support he was unable to turn into a majority, the first as a threat, the second as a promise, to persuade the President and his advisers to take him into partnership and give him power.

This is the key to the complicated and tortuous political moves of the period between the autumn of 1931 and 30 January 1933, when the game succeeded and Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor legally. The milestones on the path of the Nazi Party to power between these two dates are the successive negotiations between the little group of men who bore the responsibility for the experiment of presidential government and the Nazi leaders. Hitler did not at the time see this as the only means by which he could come to power legally. He continued to speculate on the possibility of a coalition with the Nationalists – even at one time with the Centre – or, better still, on the chances

of winning an outright majority at the next elections. Each time the negotiations broke down he turned again to these alternatives. Yet each time he gives the impression that his eye is always on a resumption of negotiations, and that the measures he takes are designed primarily to put pressure on the other side to begin talks again rather than to bring him into office by other means.

Years ago, in Vienna, Hitler had admired the tactics of Karl Lueger and had summed them up in two sentences in *Mein Kampf*: 'In his political activity, Lueger attached the main importance to winning over those classes whose threatened existence tended to stimulate rather than paralyse their will to fight. At the same time he took care to avail himself of all the instruments of authority at his disposal, and to bring powerful existing institutions over to his side, in order to gain from these well-tried sources of power the greatest possible advantage for his own movement.'[1] Hitler was well on the way to 'winning over those classes whose existence was threatened'; now he faced the task of 'bringing the powerful existing institutions over to his side', above all the Army and the President. The years of waiting were at an end.

1. *Mein Kampf*, p. 95.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MONTHS OF OPPORTUNITY

October 1931–30 January 1933

I

THE first contacts between Hitler and the men who disposed of power in Germany were scarcely auspicious. At the beginning of the autumn of 1931 Schleicher had a meeting with Hitler, arranged with Röhm's help, and subsequently persuaded both the Chancellor and the President to see him. Brüning received the Nazi leader, accompanied by Göring, at the home of one of his Ministers, Treviranus.

What Brüning asked for was Hitler's support until the reparations question was settled and Hindenburg re-elected as President. After this had been accomplished he was willing to retire and allow someone else more acceptable to the parties of the Right to take his place. Instead of giving a direct answer, Hitler launched into a monologue, the main point of which was that when he came to power he would not only get rid of Germany's debts but would re-arm and, with England and Italy as his allies, force France to her knees. He failed to impress either the Chancellor or Treviranus, and the meeting ended inconclusively, neither Hitler nor Hugenberg (whom Brüning saw about the same time) being willing to bind themselves.

The interview with the President on 10 October was the first occasion on which the two men had met. Hitler was nervous and ill-at-ease; his niece, Geli Raubal, with whom he was in love, had committed suicide three weeks before,[1] and he had wired to Göring, who was at the bedside of his dying wife in Sweden, to return and accompany him. Nazi accounts of the meeting are singularly reticent,[2] but Hitler obviously made the mistake of talking too much and trying to impress the old man with his demagogic arts; instead he bored him. Hindenburg is said to have grumbled to Schleicher afterwards that he was a queer fellow who would never make a Chancellor, but, at most, a Minister of Posts.

Altogether it was a bad week for Hitler. The day after his

1. See below, c. 7.
2. cf., e.g. Gerhard Schultze-Pfälzer: *Hindenburg und Hitler zur Führung vereint* (Berlin, 1933), pp. 115–15.

interview with the President he took part in a great demonstration of the Right-wing 'National' opposition at Harzburg, a little watering-place in the Hartz Mountains. Hugenberg, representing the Nationalists; Seldte and Düsterberg, the leaders of the Stahlhelm; Dr Schacht and General von Seeckt; Graf Kalkreuth, the president of the Junkers' Land League, and half a score of figures from the Ruhr and Rhineland industries, all joined in passing a solemn resolution uniting the parties of the Right. They demanded the immediate resignation of Brüning's Government and of the Braun Ministry in Prussia, followed by new elections in both the Reich and Prussia. Hitler only agreed to take part in the Rally with great reluctance, and Frick felt obliged to defend the decision to the Nazi contingent with a speech in which he said openly that they were only using the Nationalists as a convenient ladder to office, just as Mussolini had begun with a coalition and later got rid of his allies. The whole atmosphere irritated Hitler. He felt oppressed by his old lack of self-confidence in face of all these frock-coats, top-hats, Army uniforms, and formal titles. This was the *Reaktion* on parade, and the great radical Tribune was out of place. To add to his irritation, the Stahlhelm arrived in much greater numbers than the S.A., and Hugenberg and Seldte stole the limelight. Hitler declined to take part in the official procession, read his speech in a perfunctory fashion, and left before the Stahlhelm marched past. The united front of the National Opposition had virtually collapsed before it was established. The fight between the rival Right-wing parties, and the rival party armies, Stahlhelm and S.A., continued unabated, despite the bitter complaints of the Nationalist and Stahlhelm leaders at the Nazis' uncomradely conduct.[1]

Two days later, on 13 October, Brüning presented to the Reichstag a reconstituted government in which General Groener, the Minister of Defence – at Schleicher's suggestion – took over the Ministry of the Interior, and the Chancellor himself became Foreign Minister. In face of the Nationalists' and Nazis' demands for his resignation, Brüning appeared to be taking on a new lease of political life, with renewed proofs of the support of the Army and the President.

Hitler expressed his frustration and fury at the course of events

1. See the collection of acrimonious letters between Hitler, Röhm, and the Stahlhelm leaders, dating from October–December 1931, and printed verbatim in Th. Düsterberg: *Der Stahlhelm und Hitler* (Wolfenbüttel, 1949), pp. 15–33.

in an open letter to the Chancellor (published on 14 October) in which he attacked the policy of the Government as a disastrous betrayal of German interests, adding a stinging postscript for the benefit of Generals Groener and von Schleicher:

> The most regrettable feature of all is that the last instrument which is still sound in its general outlook – the instrument on which you alone can still today rely for support – the Army – is now involved through its representatives in the Government directly and indirectly in these struggles. . . . For us the Army is the expression of the strength of the nation for the defence of its national interests abroad. For you, Herr Chancellor Brüning, it is in the last resort an institution for the defence of the Government at home. The triumph of our ideas will give the entire nation a political and philosophical outlook which will bring the Army in spirit into a truly close relationship to the whole people and will thus free it from the painful circumstance of being an alien body within its own people. The consequence of your view, Herr Chancellor, will be an obligation on the part of the Army to uphold a political system which in its traditions and inmost views is the deadly opponent of the spirit of an army. And so finally, whether deliberately or not, the Army will be stamped with the character of a police-troop designed more or less for internal purposes.[1]

Having delivered this broadside, Hitler went off on 17 October to Brunswick, where more than a hundred thousand S.A. and S.S men tramped past the saluting base for six hours, and the thundering cheers mollified his wounded vanity. Thirty-eight special trains and five thousand lorries brought the Brown Shirts pouring into Brunswick. Hitler presented twenty-four new standards, and at night a great torchlight parade lighted up the countryside. This was a show the like of which neither Hugenberg and the Stahlhelm nor the Government could put on: while they continued to talk of the need for popular support, Hitler already had it.

The first attempt to initiate negotiations had broken down, but the failure was not irremediable. Events continued to flow in Hitler's favour. In December 1931, the figure of registered unemployment passed the five-million mark. On 8 December the President signed new emergency decrees making further reductions in wages, prices, and interest rates, together with an increase in taxation. It was a grim winter in Germany. Brüning described

1. Hitler's open letter, published together with other letters exchanged with Dr Brüning, in a Nazi pamphlet: *Hitlers Auseinandersetzung mit Brüning* (Munich, 1932), pp. 35–6.

his measures as unequalled in the demands they made on the German people, yet all he could do was to hold on in the hope that, with the spring, the Depression might begin to lessen in severity. Then he might be able to negotiate the end of reparations (which were already suspended) and secure some satisfaction of Germany's demands from the Disarmament Conference due to meet in the coming year. This was poor comfort, however, to a people suffering from the primitive misery of hunger, cold, lack of work, and lack of hope. Nor was Brüning, with his aloof and reserved manner, the man to put across a programme of sacrifice and austerity.

By contrast, the Nazis gained steadily in strength. Their membership of 389,000 at the beginning of 1931 rose to more than 800,000 at the end of the year. Following their success in the Oldenburg provincial elections in May (over thirty-seven per cent of the votes), and at Hamburg in September, the Nazis swept the board at the Hessian elections in November.[1] They more than doubled the votes they had won in Hesse during the Reichstag elections of September 1930, and pushed up their numbers in the Diet from one to twenty-seven deputies. Their average vote for the eight most recent provincial elections was thirty-five per cent, compared with the eighteen per cent which had given them over six million votes in the national elections of September 1930. The threat and the promise were gaining in weight.

These facts were not lost on General von Schleicher, who continued his talks with Hitler in November and December. Schleicher was more and more impressed with the need to bring Hitler into the game and make use of him. The French Military Attaché in Berlin, Colonel Chapouilly, reported on 4 November 1931: 'In Schleicher's view, Hitler knows very well how to distinguish between the demagogy suitable to a young Party, and the needs of national and international life. He has already moderated the actions of his troops on more than one occasion, and one can secure more from him. Faced with the forces he controls, there is only one policy to adopt – to use him and win him over,

1. There were seventeen states in Germany, of the most remarkable diversity in size and power: Prussia (thirty-eight millions); Bavaria (seven millions); Saxony (five millions); Württemberg and Baden (each over two millions); Thuringia, Hesse, and Hamburg (a million to a million and a half each); Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Oldenburg, and Brunswick (over half a million); Anhalt and Bremen (a third of a million); Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Lippe, Lübeck (ranging from 110,000 to 163,000); and Schaumburg-Lippe (48,000).

foreseeing with some reason the loss of the revolutionary wing of his party.'[1] Under the influence of Schleicher, even Groener – so Professor Meinecke records[2] – resigned himself during the winter to the idea of compromising with the Nazis and bringing individual National Socialists into the Government.

Hitler meanwhile kept up the attack on Brüning as the embodiment of all the evils of the 'System' by which Germany had been governed since 1918. He answered Brüning's broadcast of 8 December, in which the Chancellor explained and defended his new decrees, with another open letter (published 13 December 1931). Brüning's appeal for national unity and an end of factious criticism he met with the retort that there was still freedom of speech in Germany. 'You yourself, Herr Chancellor, jealously see to it that only the Government is permitted liberty of action in Germany; and thus there arises of necessity the limitation of the opposition to the sphere of criticism, of speech. . . . The Government, Herr Chancellor, can act. It can prove the rightness of its views by deeds. And it takes jealous care that no one else shall enjoy such possibilities. What then, Herr Chancellor, remains for us but speech, to bring to the knowledge of the German nation our views on the ruinous character of your plans, or the errors which underlie them, and the disasters which must ensue?'[3]

This letter is interesting for a frank statement by Hitler of what he meant by legality. In his broadcast Brüning had said: 'When a man declares that once he has achieved power by legal means he will break through the barriers, he is not really adhering to legality.'[4] Hitler replied: 'You refuse, as a "statesman", to admit that if we come to power legally we could then break through legality. Herr Chancellor, the fundamental thesis of democracy runs: "All power issues from the People." The constitution lays down the way by which a conception, an idea, and therefore an organization, must gain from the people the legitimation for the realization of its aims. But in the last resort it is the People itself which determines its Constitution.

'Herr Chancellor, if the German nation once empowers the

1. Quoted by G. Castellan: 'Von Schleicher, von Papen et l'avènement de Hitler' in *Cahiers d'Histoire de la Guerre*, Publication du Comité d'Histoire de la Guerre (Paris No. 1, January 1949), p. 18.

2. Meinecke: p. 74.

3. *Hitlers Auseinandersetzung mit Brüning*, pp. 49–51. I have used the translation of this passage in Baynes: vol. 1, pp. 496–7.

4. ibid., p. 45. Brüning's broadcast of 8 December 1931.

National Socialist Movement to introduce a Constitution other than that which we have today, then you cannot stop it. . . . When a Constitution proves itself to be useless for its life, the nation does not die – the Constitution is altered.'[1]

Here was a plain enough warning of what Hitler meant to do when he got power, yet Schleicher, Papen, and the rest were so sure of their own ability to manage this ignorant agitator that they only smiled and took no notice.

Brüning had fewer illusions, but all his plans depended upon being able to hold out until economic conditions improved, or he could secure some success in foreign policy. His ability to do this depended in turn upon the re-election of Hindenburg as President at the end of his term of office. This was a considerable risk to take, as Hindenburg was eighty-four and failing in health, yet Brüning believed that he could rely on Hindenburg to support him and continue to sign the decrees he laid before him. The old man was reluctant to go on, and only agreed when the Chancellor promised to try to secure an agreement with the Party leaders in the Reichstag which would provide the two-thirds majority necessary to prolong the presidential term of office without re-election. In any case, a bitter electoral contest for the Presidency at such a time was something to be avoided. And so Brüning, too, agreed to further negotiations with Hitler in order to win him over to his plan.

Hitler was in Munich, in the offices of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, when the summons came. A telegram was brought in to him as he stood talking to Hess, Rosenberg, and Wilhelm Weiss, one of the editors. When he read it he is reported to have purred with satisfaction and crashed his fist down on the telegram in exultation: 'Now I have them in my pocket. They have recognized me as a partner in their negotiations.'[2]

The talks took place early in the New Year, 1932. Hitler saw General Groener on 6 January, Brüning and Schleicher on the 7th. Further conferences followed on the 10th, at which Hitler was accompanied, as before, by Röhm. Brüning's proposal was substantially the same as in the previous autumn: Hitler was asked to agree to a prolongation of Hindenburg's presidency for a year or two, until the country had begun its economic recovery and the issues of reparations and the German claim to equality of

1. *Hitlers Auseinandersetzung mit Brüning*, p. 56.
2. Heiden: *Der Führer*, p. 342.

rights in armaments had been settled. In return, Brüning renewed his offer to resign as soon as he had settled the question of reparations. According to some accounts,[1] although this is omitted by others and neither confirmed nor denied by Dr Brüning himself, the Chancellor added that he would then suggest Hitler's name to the President as Chancellor.

Hitler asked for time to consider his reply and withdrew to the Kaiserhof, the big hotel in the Wilhelmstrasse, opposite the Reich Chancellery and the Presidential Palace, where he had made his headquarters. Hugenberg, who was also consulted by the Chancellor, as leader of the Nationalists, was strongly opposed to prolonging Hindenburg's term of office, arguing that it could only strengthen Brüning's position. Goebbels took the same view. In his diary he wrote: 'The Presidency is not really in question. Brüning only wants to stabilize his own position indefinitely. ... The contest for power, the game of chess, has begun. It may last throughout the year. It will be a fast game, played with intelligence and skill. The main point is that we hold fast, and waive all compromise.'[2] Two opposing arguments had to be weighed against each other. Gregor Strasser's view was that Hindenburg would be unbeatable in any election the Nazis might force on the Government, and that it was in the Party's interests to accept a temporary truce. But Röhm as well as Goebbels argued that it would be a fatal mistake for the Party to appear to avoid a chance to go to the nation, especially after the recent successes in the provincial elections. Long and anxious debates followed among the Nazi leaders. In the end Röhm's point of view was accepted.

Hugenberg's reply to Brüning's proposal, on behalf of the Nationalists, was delivered on 12 January 1932, and contained a blank refusal. Hitler also rejected it, but tried to drive a wedge between Chancellor and President. He did this by writing direct to the President over Brüning's head, warning him that the Chancellor's plan was an infringement of the Constitution; adding, however, that he himself was willing to support Hindenburg's re-election if the President would repudiate Brüning's proposal. To Meissner, whom he invited to a conference at the Kaiserhof as the President's

1. e.g., Heiden: *History of National Socialism*, p. 151; Bénoist-Méchin: *Histoire de l'armée allemande*, vol. II, p. 426.

2. Goebbels: *Vom Kaiserhof zur Reichskanzlei.* English translation: *My Part in Germany's Fight* (London, 1935), pp. 16–17 (hereafter referred to as Goebbels).

representative, Hitler offered to make Hindenburg the joint presidential candidate of the Nazis and the Nationalists, if the old man would agree to dismiss Brüning, form a Right-wing 'National' government, and hold new elections for the Reichstag and the Prussian Diet.[1] The newly elected Reichstag, in which Hitler was confident of a majority for the Nazi and Nationalist parties, would then proceed to prolong his term of office.

When this manoeuvre broke down on Hindenburg's refusal, Hitler launched a violent attack on Brüning in two more open letters, dated 15 and 25 January, the second being in answer to Brüning's reply. Hitler repeated the charge that Brüning was proposing to violate the Constitution in order to keep himself in power, and declared that the Reichstag elected in 1930 was not competent to prolong Hindenburg's term of office, since it no longer represented the German people. When Brüning in turn accused Hitler of playing party politics at the expense of Germany's chances of improving her international position, Hitler retorted that nothing could be more beneficial to German foreign policy then the overthrow of the 'System' by which Germany had been governed since 1918. 'It would never have come to a Treaty of Versailles, if the parties which support you – the Centre, the Social Democrats, and the Democrats – had not undermined, destroyed, and betrayed the old Reich, if they had not prepared and carried through the Revolution (of 1918) or at least accepted and defended it.'[2]

After this exchange any hopes of avoiding an election for the presidency were at an end. For a second time the attempt to do a deal with Hitler had failed. Brüning, who had never had much hope of its success, threw all his energy into the campaign. Schleicher, who had counted on Röhm to get the other Nazi leaders to accept the proposal made to them, was equally set on securing the President's re-election, since the position and powers of the Presidency were the basis of his plans. Until that had been accomplished he could not develop these plans further. For that reason he was willing to support Brüning's continuance in office so that he could manage the election campaign. After that, General von Schleicher considered, a lot of things might happen. The President himself was nettled by the refusal of the Right-wing parties to support the prolongation of his office, and finally

1. Otto Meissner: *Staatssekretär* (Hamburg, 1950), pp. 216–17.
2. *Hitlers Auseinandersetzung mit Brüning* (in which Hitler's first letter, Brüning's reply and Hitler's second letter are printed in full), p. 92.

agreed to offer himself for re-election. On the Government side of the fence, therefore, the breakdown of the negotiations had been followed by at least a temporary consolidation of forces in Brüning's favour.

II

This was far from being the case in the Nazi camp. Now that his attempt to split Hindenburg and Brüning had failed, Hitler had to face an awkward decision. Was he to risk an open contest with Hindenburg? The President's reputation as the most famous figure of the old Army would inevitably attract many votes from the Right, while his position as the defender of the Republic against the extremists would win the support of the moderate and democratic parties. Hindenburg, or rather the Hindenburg legend, was a formidable opponent. Failure might destroy the growing belief in Nazi invincibility: on the other hand, dare they risk evading the contest?

For a month Hitler hesitated, and Goebbels's diary is eloquent on the indecision and anxiety of the Nazi leaders. By 2 February Hitler had tentatively decided to stand, but to delay the announcement. Goebbels adds: 'The whole thing teems with worry.' The next days he records: 'Late at night many old members of the Party come to see me. They are discouraged at not yet having heard anything decisive. They fear the Leader may wait too long.' A week after the first decision, on 9 February, Goebbels writes: 'The Leader is back in Berlin. More discussions at the Kaiserhof. Everything is in suspense.' 12 February: 'Publication of the decision is put off a few days longer.' 21 February: 'This everlasting waiting is almost demoralizing.' Not until 22 February would Hitler allow Goebbels to announce his candidature to a packed Nazi meeting at the big Berlin Sportpalast. 'When, after about an hour's preparation, I publicly proclaim that the Leader will come forward as a candidate, a storm of deafening applause rages for nearly ten minutes. Wild ovations for the Leader. The audience rises with shouts of joy. They nearly raise the roof. . . . People laugh and cry at the same time.'[1]

Shortly before Goebbels spoke the Nationalists and the Stahlhelm announced that they would put up their own candidate. The Harzburg front of the Nationalists and Nazis was thus finally broken; or, as Goebbels put it: 'We have come to grips now for the first time with the Reaction.' With little confidence in the

1. Goebbels: pp. 33–47.

result, the Nationalists chose as their candidate, not Hugenberg, nor even Seldte, the leader of the Stahlhelm, but Seldte's second-in-command, Duesterberg. This was as good as saying that they expected to lose in advance. Characteristically, Hitler, after hesitating for a month, now staked everything on winning, and flung himself into the campaign with a whole-hearted conviction of success. Once he had embarked on a course of action, Hitler was not a man to look back.

The period of waiting had not been wasted. Even before Hitler finally broke off the negotiations with Brüning, Goebbels was already at work preparing for the election campaign. On 24 January he noted in his diary: 'The elections are prepared down to the minutest detail. It will be a struggle such as the world has never before witnessed.' On 4 February he writes: 'The lines of the election campaign are all laid down. We now need only to press the button to set the machine going.'

One of Goebbel's greatest anxieties had been the financing of the election campaign. On 5 January he wrote despairingly: 'Money is wanting everywhere. It is very difficult to obtain. Nobody will give us credit. Once you get the power you can get the cash galore, but then you need it no longer. Without the power you need the money, but then you can't get it.' A month later (8 February) he was much more cheerful: 'Money affairs improve daily. The financing of the electoral campaign is practically assured.' One of the reasons for this sudden change of tone in Goebbels's references to finance was a visit Hitler had paid to Düsseldorf, the capital of the German steel industry, on 27 January.

The meeting, arranged by Fritz Thyssen, was held in the Park Hotel, where Hitler spoke to the Industry Club. It was the first time that many of the West German industrialists present had met Hitler, and their reception of him was cool and reserved. Yet Hitler, far from being nervous, spoke for two and a half hours without pause, and made one of the best speeches of his life. In it is to be found every one of the stock ideas out of which he built his propaganda, brilliantly dressed up for the audience of businessmen he was addressing. For this reason it is worth quoting at some length as an example of his technique as a speaker.

With his mind still full of the last exchange of letters with the Chancellor, Hitler began by attacking Brüning's view that the dominant consideration in German politics at this time ought to

be the country's foreign relations. 'I regard it as of the first importance to break down the view that our destiny is conditioned by world events. . . . Assertions that a people's fate is solely determined by foreign powers have always formed the shifts of bad governments.' The determining factor in national life was the inner worth of a people and its spirit. In Germany, however, this inner worth had been undermined by setting up the false values of democracy and the supremacy of mere numbers in opposition to the creative principle of individual personality.

Hitler chose his illustrations with skill. Private property, he pointed out, could only be justified on the ground that men's achievements in the economic field were unequal. 'But it is absurd to build up economic life on the conceptions of achievement, of the value of personality and on the authority of personality, while in the political sphere you deny this authority and thrust in its place the law of the greatest number – democracy.' Not only was it inconsistent, it was dangerous, for the philosophy of egalitarianism would in time be extended from politics to economics, as it already had been in Bolshevik Russia: 'In the economic sphere Communism is analogous to democracy in the political sphere.'

Hitler dwelt at length on the threat of Communism, for it was something more, he said, than 'a mob storming about in some of our streets in Germany, it a conception of the world which is in the act of subjecting to itself the entire Asiatic continent'. Unless it were halted it would 'gradually shatter the whole world . . . and transform it as completely as did Christianity'. Already, thanks to the economic crisis, Communism had gained a foothold in Germany. Unemployment was driving millions of Germans to look on Communism as the 'logical theoretical counterpart of their actual economic situation'. This was the heart of the German problem – not the result of foreign conditions, 'but of our internal aberration, our internal division, our internal collapse'. And this state of affairs was not to be cured by the economic expedients embodied in emergency decrees, but by the exercise of political power. It was not economics but politics that formed the prime factor in national life.

For it was not German business that conquered the world, followed by the development of German power, but the power-State which created for the business world the general conditions for its subsequent prosperity [*Very true!*]. In my view it is to put the cart before the horse when today people believe that by business methods they can recover Germany's power-position, instead of realizing that the power-position is

also the condition for the improvement of the economic situation. . . . There is only one fundamental solution - the realization that there can be no flourishing economic life which has not before it and behind it a flourishing, powerful State as its protection. . . . There can be no economic life unless behind this economic life there stands the determined political will of the nation absolutely ready to strike – and to strike hard. . . . The essential thing is the formation of the political will of the nation: that is the starting point for political action.

The same, Hitler went on, was true of foreign policy.

The Treaty of Versailles in itself is only the consequence of our own slow inner confusion and aberration of mind. . . . In the life of peoples the strength which can be turned outwards depends upon the strength of a nation's internal organization, and that in turn upon the stability of views held in common on certain fundamental questions.

It was no good appealing for national unity and sacrifice for the State when

fifty per cent of the people wish only to smash the State in pieces and feel themselves to be the vanguard not only of an alien attitude towards the State . . . but of a will which is hostile to the State . . . when only fifty per cent of a people are ready to fight for the national colours, while fifty per cent have hoisted another flag which stands for a State which is to be found only outside the bounds of their own State.

Unless Germany can master this internal division in *Weltanschauungen* no measures of the legislature can stop the decline of the German nation. [*Very true!*]

Recognizing this fact, the Nazi movement had set out to create a new outlook which would re-unite and re-vitalize the German people.

Here is an organization which is filled with an indomitable, aggressive spirit, an organization which, when a political opponent says 'Your behaviour we regard as a provocation,' does not see fit immediately to retire from the scene, but brutally enforces its own will and hurls against the opponent the retort: 'We fight today! We fight tomorrow! And if you regard our meeting today as a provocation we shall hold yet another next week – until you have learned that it is no provocation when *German* Germany also professes its belief. . . .' And when people cast in our teeth our intolerance, we proudly acknowledge it – yes, we have formed the inexorable decision to destroy Marxism in Germany down to its very last root. . . . Today we stand at the turning-point of Germany's destiny. . . . Either we shall succeed in working out a body-politic hard as iron from this conglomeration of parties, associations,

unions, and *Weltanschauungen*, from this pride of rank and madness of class, or else, lacking this internal consolidation, Germany will fall in final ruin. . . .

Remember that it means sacrifice when today many hundreds of thousands of S.A. and S.S. men every day have to mount on their lorries, protect meetings, undertake marches, sacrifice themselves night after night and then come back in the grey dawn to workshop and factory, or as unemployed to take the pittance of the dole; it means sacrifice when from the little they possess they have to buy their uniforms, their shirts, their badges, yes, and even pay their own fares. But there is already in all this the force of an ideal – a great ideal! And if the whole German nation today had the same faith in its vocation as these hundred thousands, if the whole nation possessed this idealism, Germany would stand in the eyes of the world otherwise than she stands now![1]

When Hitler sat down the audience, whose reserve had long since thawed, rose and cheered him wildly. 'The effect upon the industrialists,' wrote Otto Dietrich, who was present, 'was great, and very evident during the next hard months of struggle.'[2] Thyssen adds that, as a result of the impression Hitler made, large contributions from the resources of heavy industry flowed into the Nazi treasury. With an astuteness which matched that of his appeal to the Army, Hitler had won an important victory. As the Army officers saw in Hitler the man who promised to restore Germany's military power, so the industrialists came to see in him the man who would defend their interests against the threat of Communism and the claims of the trade unions, giving a free hand to private enterprise and economic exploitation in the name of the principle of 'creative individuality'.

III

The election campaign for the Presidency was the first of five major electoral contests in Germany in less than nine months. It was notable for a number of reasons. First, because of the bitterness with which it was fought. Goebbels set the tone by his reference to Hindenburg in the Reichstag as 'the candidate of the party of deserters', and the Nazis, who knew they were fighting against heavy odds, spared neither the President nor anyone else in their attacks on the 'System'. Their violence aroused the Republican parties to great efforts in their turn: nearly eighty-five

1. Baynes: vol. I, pp. 777–829, a verbatim translation of the speech.
2. Otto Dietrich: (English translation) p. 14.

per cent of the total electorate voted, and in many urban areas the vote was as high as ninety-five per cent. Second, because of the extraordinary confusion of parties. Hindenburg, a Protestant, a Prussian, and a monarchist, received his most solid support from the Social Democrats and the trade unions, the Catholic Centre (Brüning's own party), and the other smaller democratic parties, to whom the old man had become a symbol of the Constitution. The conservative upper classes of the Protestant north voted either for Düsterberg, the candidate of the Nationalist Party (to which Hindenburg himself belonged by rights), or for the Austrian demagogue, Hitler, who was hurriedly made a German citizen only on the eve of the election by the Nazi-controlled state of Brunswick. Industry and big business divided its support between all three candidates, while the working-class vote was split by the Communists, whose bitterest attack was directed against the rival Social Democrats and the trade unions.

The third factor which made the election notable was the character of the Nazi campaign, a masterpiece of organized agitation which attempted to take Germany by storm. Every constituency down to the most remote village was canvassed. In the little Bavarian hamlet of Dietramszell, where the President spent his summer holidays, the Nazis brought in some of their best speakers to capture 228 votes against the Field-Marshal's 157 – a typical piece of Nazi spite. The walls of the towns were plastered with screaming Nazi posters; films of Hitler and Goebbels were made and shown everywhere (an innovation in 1932); gramophone records were produced which could be sent through the post, two hundred thousand marks spent on propaganda in one week alone. But, true to Hitler's belief in the superiority of the spoken word, the main Nazi effort went into organizing a chain of mass meetings at which the principal Nazi orators, Hitler, Goebbels, Gregor Strasser, worked their audiences up to hysterical enthusiasm by mob oratory of the most unrestrained kind. Goebbels's own programme, which can be reconstructed from his diary, is impressive enough. Between 22 February and 12 March he made nineteen speeches in Berlin (including four in the huge Sportpalast) and addressed mass meetings in nine other towns as widely separated as Breslau, Dresden, Cologne, Hamburg, and Nuremberg, dashing back to Berlin by the night train to supervise the work of the central propaganda organization. At Breslau Hitler spoke to sixty thousand people; in other places to crowds estimated at one hundred thousand.

The result was baffling. When the polls were closed on the evening of 13 March the Nazi vote had been pushed up from just under six and a half millions in September 1930 to just under eleven and a half millions, an increase of eighty-six per cent, giving Hitler nearly one-third of the total votes in Germany. But all the Nazi efforts left them more than seven million votes behind Hindenburg's figure of 18,661,736. In Berlin alone Hindenburg had polled 45 per cent of the votes and the Communists 28·7 as against Hitler's 23 per cent. This was outright defeat, and Goebbels was in despair.

By a quirk of chance, however, Hindenburg's vote was 0·4 per cent – less than two hundred thousand votes – short of the absolute majority required. A second election had therefore to be held. While Goebbels in Berlin threw up his hands, Hitler in Munich immediately announced that he would stand again, and before morning on 14 March special editions of the *Völkischer Beobachter* were on the streets carrying a new election manifesto: 'The first election campaign is over, the second has begun today. I shall lead it.'

It was an uphill fight, with Hitler driving a tired and dispirited Party, but the ingenious mind of Goebbels, once he had recovered his nerve, hit on a novel electioneering device. The leader should cover Germany by plane – 'Hitler over Germany'. On 3 April the flight began with four mass meetings in Saxony, at which Hitler addressed a quarter of a million people. After Dresden, Leipzig, Chemnitz, and Plauen came more meetings at Berlin, Königsberg, Nuremberg, Frankfurt, Essen, Stuttgart, and Munich – in all, twenty different towns in a week from East Prussia to Westphalia, from the Baltic to Bavaria. On 8 April, when a violent storm raged over Western Germany and all other air traffic was grounded, the leader flew to Düsseldorf and kept his engagement, with the whole Nazi Press blaring away that here at last was the man with the courage Germany needed.

Defeat was certain, but by his exacting performance Hitler pushed up his vote again on 10 April by more than two millions to 13,417,460. The President was safely home with a comfortable 53 per cent – over nineteen and a quarter million votes – yet by tenacity and boldness Hitler had avoided disaster, capturing votes not only from the Nationalist candidate, who had failed to stay the course in the second election, but also from the Communists, whose vote fell by over a million. The day after the election Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'The campaign for the Prussian

State elections is prepared. We go on without a breathing space.'

Once again, however, the awkward question presented itself: how was electoral success, which, however remarkable, still fell far short of a clear majority, to be turned to political advantage? On 11 March Goebbels noted: 'Talked over instructions with the S.A. and S.S. commanders. Deep uneasiness is rife everywhere. The notion of an uprising haunts the air.' And again, on 2 April: 'The S.A. getting impatient. It is understandable enough that the soldiers begin to lose morale through these long-drawn-out political contests. It has to be stopped though, at all costs. A premature putsch would nullify our whole future.' On the other side, Gregor Strasser, who had opposed fighting the presidential campaign from the beginning, now renewed his argument that the chances of success for the policy of legality were being thrown away by Hitler's 'all-or-nothing' attitude and his refusal to make a deal, except on his own exaggerated terms. What was the point of Hitler's virtuoso performance as an agitator, Strasser asked, if it led the Party, not to power, but into a political cul-de-sac?

For the moment Hitler had no answer to either side, either to the impatient S.A. or to the critical Strasser. It was the Government which, strengthened by the elections, now took the initiative and used its advantage to move at last against the S.A.

At the end of November 1931 the State authorities of Hesse had secured certain documents drawn up by the legal adviser to the Nazi Party in Hesse, Dr Werner Best, after secret discussions among a small group of local Nazi leaders at the house of a Dr Wagner, Boxheimer Hof – from which they became known as the Boxheim Papers. These papers contained a draft of the proclamation to be issued by the S.A. in the event of a Communist rising, and suggestions for emergency decrees to be issued by a provisional Nazi government after the Communists had been defeated. Such an emergency, according to the documents captured, would justify drastic measures, and arrangements were to be made for the immediate execution of those who resisted the Nazi authorities, who refused to cooperate or who were found in possession of arms. Amongst the measures proposed was the abolition of the right to private property, of the obligation to pay debts of interest on savings, and of all private incomes. The S.A. was to be given the right to administer the property of the State and of all private citizens; all work was to be compulsory, with-

out reward, and people were to be fed by a system of food cards and public kitchens. Provision was added for the erection of courts-martial under Nazi presidents.

The discovery of these plans caused a sensation, and seriously embarrassed Hitler, who declared (probably with justice) that he had known nothing of them and, had he known, would have disavowed them. Despite pressure from the Prussian State Government, however, the Reich Government declined to take action against the Nazis, and General Groener, the Reich Minister of the Interior, expressed his confidence in Hitler's adherence to a policy of legality.[1]

Evidence of Nazi plans for a seizure of power continued to accumulate. However much Hitler underlined his insistence upon legal methods, the character of the S.A. organization was such that the idea of a putsch was bound to come naturally to men whose politics were conducted in an atmosphere of violence and semi-legality. On the day of the first presidential election Röhm had ordered his S.A. and S.S. troops to stand by in their barracks, while a ring of Nazi forces was drawn round the capital. Prussian police, raiding Nazi headquarters, found copies of Röhm's orders and marked maps which confirmed the report that the S.A. had been prepared to carry out a *coup d'état* if Hitler secured a majority. Near the Polish frontier other orders were captured instructing the local S.A. in Pomerania not to take part in the defence of Germany in the event of a surprise Polish attack.

As a result of these discoveries the State governments, led by Prussia and Bavaria, presented Groener with an ultimatum. Either the Reich Government must act against the S.A. or, they hinted, they would take independent action themselves. In his letter of 1947 Brüning expresses the view that such action was premature[2] although he gives no reasons for this. Groener, however, felt obliged to act, partly to avoid a situation which would undermine the authority of the Reich Government, partly to avoid the loss of the Social Democratic support on which Brüning depended, and which was likely to be withdrawn if the demands of the Prussian State Government were not met. On 10 April, the day of the second election, a meeting presided over by the Chancellor confirmed Groener's view, and on the 14th a decree was promulgated dissolving the S.A., the S.S., and all their

1. Conference at the Ministry of the Interior, 14 December 1931. Craig: op. cit., p. 216.
2. Brüning: 'Ein Brief', p. 4.

affiliated organizations. The decree added, as the grounds for this belated action: 'These organizations form a private army whose very existence constitutes a state within the State, and represent a permanent source of trouble for the civil population. . . . It is exclusively the business of the State to maintain organized forces. The toleration of such a partisan organization . . . inevitably leads to clashes and to conditions comparable to civil war.'

Röhm for a moment thought of resistance; after all, the S.A. now numbered four hundred thousand men, four times the size of the Army allowed to Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. But Hitler was insistent: the S.A. must obey. His authority held, and overnight the Brown Shirts disappeared from the streets. But the S.A. organization was left intact; the S.A. troops were merely dismissed from parade, to reappear as ordinary Party members; Brüning and Groener would get their answer, Hitler declared, at the Prussian elections.

Prussia was by far the largest of the German states, embracing nearly two-thirds of the whole territory of the Reich, with a population of forty out of a total of sixty-five millions. Throughout the period of the Weimar Republic the Prussian Diet and the Prussian State Government, based on a coalition of the Social Democratic and Centre parties, had been the stronghold of German democracy. The Prussian Ministry of the Interior, which controlled by far the biggest administration and police force in Germany and was held by a Social Democrat, Karl Severing, had been more active than any other official agency in trying to check Nazi excesses, and was the object of venomous Nazi attacks. To capture a majority in Prussia, therefore, would be a political victory for the Nazis second only in importance to securing a majority in the Reichstag.

The date of the Prussian elections had been fixed for 24 April, at the same time as State elections in Bavaria, Anhalt, Württemberg and Hamburg. Altogether some four-fifths of Germany would go to the polls. The Nazi propaganda machine was switched immediately from the Presidential to the State elections. In a second series of highly publicized flights over Germany, Hitler spoke in twenty-six towns between 15 and 23 April. His attack this time was directed against the Social Democrats, and in the working-class quarters of the big towns the Nazis got rough handling. In Prussia they won the same thirty-six per cent of votes they had secured in the second presidential election, and,

with eight million votes, became the strongest party in the Prussian Diet. The coalition of the Social Democrats and the Centre lost its majority, and the Government of Prussia without Nazi cooperation became an impossibility. Yet once again the Nazis fell short of the majority for which they had hoped.

Even with the support of the Nationalists, the Nazis were not strong enough to form an administration in Prussia. Elsewhere – in Württemberg, Bavaria, and Hamburg – their gains in the number of deputies were offset by the fact that they had failed to reach the national percentage of votes they had won in the second presidential election. By comparison with the thirty-six per cent they secured on 10 April, their votes now stood at 26·4 per cent in Württemberg, 32·5 in Bavaria, and 31 per cent in Hamburg. In all three they were well short of a majority. The deadlock therefore continued. Three times the trumpet had sounded and still the walls refused to fall. At the end of a list of their triumphs Goebbels added to his diary the despondent comment: 'Something must happen now. We *must* shortly come to power, otherwise our victory will be a Pyrrhic one.'[1]

At this moment there appeared a *deus ex machina* in the shape of General von Schleicher, prepared to discuss once again the admission of the Nazis by the back door.

IV

General Schleicher had resumed his relations with Röhm and with the Chief of the Berlin S.A., Helldorf, before the presidential elections. He appears at this time to have been playing with the idea of detaching the S.A. from Hitler, and bringing them under the jurisdiction of the State as the militia Röhm had always wanted to make them.[2] Unknown to Hitler, it had already been agreed between Röhm and Schleicher that, in the event of a war-emergency, the S.A. would come under the command of the Army. Schleicher, however, was still attracted by the alternative idea of bringing Hitler himself into the Government camp. In either case, the prohibition of the S.A. was bound to embarrass his plans.

1. Goebbels: p. 82.
2. cf. Heiden: *Der Führer*, pp. 355–6; also Gordon Craig: p. 227, where he says that Groener inclined to the view that Schleicher hoped to seduce the S.A. from its allegiance to the Führer through his own close liaison with Röhm.

Although he agreed to Groener's action on 8 April, when it was first discussed, the next day Schleicher began to make objections and propose changes of plan – such as a last warning to Hitler. This was rejected at the meeting in the Chancellery on the 10th, but Schleicher persisted in stirring up opposition in the Army and went behind Groener's back to the President. He let Hitler know that he did not agree with the ban, and persuaded Hindenburg to write an irritable letter to Groener complaining about the activities of the Social Democratic organization, the Reichsbanner, with the implication that the prohibition of the S.A. had been one-sided. The material for this letter, Groener discovered, had been provided from a section in his own Ministry of Defence which was under Schleicher's direction, and the letter had been made public almost before he had received it. A malicious whispering campaign against Groener himself now began, and on 10 May Göring delivered a violent attack on him in the Reichstag. When Groener, a sick man, attempted to reply, he met a storm of abuse and obstruction from the Nazi benches. Scarcely had he sat down, exhausted by the effort, when he was blandly informed by Schleicher, the man he regarded almost as his own son, and by Hammerstein, the Commander-in-Chief, that the Army no longer had confidence in him, and that it would be best for him to resign. Brüning loyally defended Groener, but on 12 May there were such scenes of uproar in the Reichstag that the Chamber had to be cleared by the police. The next day Groener resigned. The Nazis were jubilant.

Groener's fall, treacherously engineered by Schleicher, was a grave blow to German democracy. One of the greatest weaknesses of the Weimar Republic was the equivocal attitude of the Army towards the republican régime. Groener was the only man amongst the Army's leaders who had served it with wholehearted loyalty, and there was no one to replace him.

But Groener's departure was only a beginning. Schleicher had now made up his mind that the chief obstacle to the success of his plan for the deal with the Nazis was Brüning, who was reluctant to make concessions to the Nazis to win their support, and who had become the butt of Nazi attacks on the 'System'. The man he had himself proposed as Chancellor in March 1930 had outlived his usefulness. With the same cynical disloyalty with which he had stabbed Groener in the back, Schleicher now set about unseating Brüning.

Brüning was not in a strong position to defend himself.

Although he had striven honestly and dourly to master the crisis in Germany for two years, success still eluded him. He had failed to secure a stable majority in the Reichstag, and had so far failed to restore prosperity to Germany, even though he believed that the next few months would see a gradual easing of the depression. His great hope of redressing the humiliation of the Austro-German Customs Union plan and of offsetting domestic failure by a big success in foreign policy – the cancellation of reparations and the recognition of Germany's right to equality in armaments – had been frustrated, the first by the postponement of the Reparations Conference at Lausanne until June 1932, the second by the long-draw-out opposition of the French at the Disarmament Conference. He was to enjoy the bitter consolation of seeing his successors secure the fruits of his own labours in foreign policy, but his efforts for Germany abroad were to contribute nothing to alleviate his own difficulties. Ironically, his one great success, the re-election of the President, weakened rather than strengthened his position. For, with that safely accomplished, Brüning no longer appeared indispensable, and, under the careful coaching of Schleicher and other candid friends, the old man had come to feel resentment against the Chancellor as the man whose obstinacy had forced him to endure an election campaign, and to stand as the candidate of the Left against his own friends on the Right.

Moreover, Brüning had made powerful enemies who enjoyed great influence with the President, the man on whose willingness to continue signing emergency decrees the Chancellor ultimately depended. The industrialists complained of his attempts to keep prices down and of the social policies initiated by Stegerwald, Brüning's Labour Minister, the leader of the Catholic trade unions. A proposal for taking over insolvent properties in Eastern Germany and using these for land-colonization roused the passionate hostility of the powerful Junker class, who used the opportunity of Hindenburg's visit to his estate of Neudeck at Whitsuntide to press their demand for Brüning's dismissal as the sponsor of 'Agrarian Bolshevism'. Finally, Schleicher, claiming to speak with the legendary authority of the Army, announced that the Army no longer had confidence in the Chancellor. A stronger man was needed to deal with the situation, and he already had a suitable candidate ready in Papen. He added the all-important assurance that the Nazis had agreed to support the new Government. With Papen the President would be sure of a

Ministry which would be acceptable to his friends of the Right and to the Army, and at the same time command popular support – that elusive combination which Brüning had failed to provide.

Ostensibly Hitler played no part in the manoeuvres which led to Brüning's dismissal. On the surface, the Nazi leaders were occupied with negotiations for a possible coalition in Prussia and with the provincial elections in Mecklenburg. The possibility of a combination between the Nazis and the Catholic Centre to form a government in Prussia interested Brüning, who hoped in this way to force the Nazis to accept a share of responsibility. Safeguards could be provided by combining the premiership of Prussia with his own office of Chancellor, as Bismarck had done, and by placing control of the police in Prussia and the other federal states in the hands of the Reich Minister of the Interior. On the Nazi side, Brüning's offer was supported by Gregor Strasser, still seeking to effect a compromise solution. Even Goebbels, who hated Strasser, was impressed. On 26 April he wrote in his diary: 'We have a difficult decision to make. Coalition with the Centre and power, or opposition to the Centre minus power. From a parliamentary point of view, nothing can be achieved without the Centre – either in Prussia or the Reich. This has to be thoroughly thought over.' But Schleicher, who was in touch with the Nazi leaders through Röhm and Helldorf, and who was bent on frustrating Brüning's plans, offered more tempting possibilities. The negotiations with the Centre suddenly ceased to make progress.

On 28 April Hitler himself had a talk with Schleicher, and Goebbels, after noting that the conference went off well, added: 'The Leader has decided to do nothing at the moment, but mark time. Things are not to be precipitated.' On 8 May another meeting took place. In order to lull Brüning's suspicion, it was decided that Hitler should keep away from Berlin. Until the end of the month Hitler spent most of his time in Mecklenburg and Oldenburg – two states in which provincial elections were impending – or down in Bavaria. Röhm and Göring acted as his representatives in Berlin, but they had little more to do than to keep in touch with Schleicher and wait for news of developments.

What Schleicher offered was the overthrow of the Brüning Cabinet, the removal of the ban on the S.A. and S.S., and new elections for the Reichstag. In return for these solid advantages

he asked only for tacit support, the 'neutrality' of the Nazis towards the new presidential cabinet which Papen was to form. Such a promise cost Hitler nothing to give. Time would show who was to do the double-crossing, Schleicher or the Nazis. Meanwhile Hitler's agreement provided Schleicher with a winning argument for Hindenburg. Papen would be able to secure what Brüning had failed to get, Hitler's support, without taking him into the Cabinet. If necessary, Schleicher too reflected, alliances could always be repudiated; the important thing was to get Brüning out and Papen in.

Groener's fall on 13 May raised the hopes of the Nazi leaders high. On the 18th Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'Back in Berlin' – he had been to Munich to report to Hitler – 'For Brüning alone winter seems to have arrived. He is being secretly undermined and is already completely isolated. He is anxiously looking for collaborators – "My kingdom for a Cabinet Minister!" General Schleicher has declined the Ministry of Defence.[1] . . . Our mice are busily at work gnawing through the last supports of Brüning's position.' 'Rat' would perhaps have been a better word to describe the part played by General von Schleicher. Goebbels added some venomous comments on the activities of Gregor Strasser, who was still trying to revive the idea of a coalition with the Centre and a compromise with Brüning as an alternative to the deal with Schleicher. But Strasser's manoeuvres came to nothing. On the 24th Goebbels wrote: 'Saturday [28 May] will see the end of Brüning. The list of Ministers is more or less settled. The main point as far as we are concerned is that the Reichstag is dissolved.'

Once Brüning had secured the passage of the Finance Bill through the Reichstag there was no further need to delay. At the end of May Schleicher's and the Junkers' intrigues were crowned by the President's abrupt request for the Chancellor's resignation. On 30 May Brüning resigned. That fatal reliance on the President which he had been forced to accept as the only way out of the political deadlock had produced a situation in which governments could be made and unmade by the simple grant or withdrawal of the President's confidence. Who bore the responsibility for allowing such a situation to arise will long be a matter of

1. When Brüning, after taxing Schleicher with the intrigue against Groener, demanded that Schleicher should take his place as Minister of Defence, Schleicher retorted: 'I will, but not in your government.' cf. Wheeler-Bennett: *Hindenburg, the Wooden Titan,* p. 385.

controversy, but the result was plain enough: it was the end of democratic government in Germany. The key to power over a nation of sixty-five million people was now openly admitted to lie in the hands of an aged soldier of eighty-five and the little group of men who determined his views.

Hitler was at Horumersiel, on the North Sea, taking part in the Oldenburg elections which on 29 May provided the Nazis with a well-timed success, over forty-eight per cent of the votes and a clear majority of seats in the Diet. Over the week-end he moved to Mecklenburg. Hardly had he begun work there when the news came that Brüning was out. Goebbels rang up from Berlin just after noon and motored out to meet Hitler at Nauen. As they drove back they discussed the situation. There was little time to talk, for Hitler had to see the President at four o'clock. Göring accompanied him and the interview lasted only a few minutes. Hindenburg informed them briefly that he intended to appoint von Papen as Chancellor and understood that Hitler had agreed to support him. Was this correct? Hitler answered: 'Yes.' Back in Berlin, Goebbels commented in his diary: 'Von Papen is, it seems, to be appointed Chancellor, but that is neither here nor there. The Poll! The Poll! It's the people we want. We are all entirely satisfied.'

V

The new Chancellor, Franz von Papen, a man in his fifties, came from a Catholic family of the Westphalian nobility. He had belonged to the right cavalry regiment (he was a celebrated gentleman-rider) and now to the right clubs, the Herrenklub and the Union. He had great charm, a wide acquaintance in the social world, connexions with both German and French industry (he had married the daughter of a wealthy Saar industrialist), and considerable political ambitions. So far these ambitions had not been taken seriously by anyone else. He owned a big block of shares in *Germania*, the Centre Party's paper, and was nominally a member of the Centre Party. He only sat in the Prussian Diet, however, not in the Reichstag, and there he was in single-handed opposition to the Centre's combination with the Social Democrats by which Prussia had been governed until the April elections. Papen was no democrat; he talked vaguely of a Christian Conservatism, which in practice meant a restoration of the privileges and power of the old ruling class of Imperial days in an authori-

tarian state with a veneer of respectability. If Schleicher did not go as far as Clemenceau, who is reported to have urged the election of Sadi Carnot to the French Presidency with the recommendation 'Vote for the stupidest', he was certainly attracted to the improbable choice of Papen as Chancellor by the belief that he would prove a pliant instrument in his hands. This was to prove a serious underestimate of Papen's ambition and tenacity, no less than of his unscrupulousness. It was a choice which startled everyone and pleased few, with the important exception of the President, who was delighted with the company of a Chancellor who knew how to charm and flatter so well that he soon established relations with him such as no other minister had ever had.

If Schleicher believed that Papen would be able to rally a coalition of the Centre and the Right he was soon disillusioned. The Centre Party, furious at the arbitrary way in which Brüning had been dismissed, went into determined opposition. Hugenberg, the leader of the Nationalists, was indignant at the failure to consider his own claims, while Hitler had bound himself to no more than a vague promise of support, and no Nazis were included in the Ministry. The character of the new Government was in fact so blatantly out of keeping with feeling in the country that it aroused a universal storm of abuse. Only with great difficulty, and by the exercise of the President's personal authority, had it been possible to collect a Cabinet of men willing to serve under Papen. Of its ten members, none of whom was a political figure of the front rank, seven belonged to the nobility with known Right-wing views. Of the remainder, Professor Warmbold, the Minister of Economics, was connected with the great Dye Trust, I.G. Farben; Schaeffer, the Minister of Labour, was a director of Krupps; while the Minister of Justice, Franz Gürtner, was the Bavarian Minister who had most persistently protected Hitler in the 1920s.

Brüning, although driven to rely on the President's emergency power, had none the less been a parliamentary Chancellor in the sense that he had only once been actually defeated in the Reichstag and had then gone to the country. But from the beginning there was not the least chance of Papen avoiding an overwhelming defeat if he met parliament; the power of the 'Cabinet of Barons' was openly and unashamedly based upon the support of the President and the Army. The Social Democratic paper, *Vorwärts*, could be excused a justifiable exaggeration when it wrote of 'this little clique of feudal monarchists, come to power by backstairs

methods with Hitler's support, which now announces the class-war from above'.

Of the four parties in Germany which commanded mass support, two, the Communists and the Social Democrats, were bound to oppose Papen's government; the third, the Centre, had excommunicated him; only the fourth, the Nazis, remained as a possible ally. A temporary tolerance had been secured from the Nazis at the price of two concessions: the dissolution of the Reichstag and the lifting of the ban on the S.A. The question which dominated German politics from the end of May 1932 to the end of January 1933 was whether this temporary arrangement could be turned into a permanent coalition.

Both sides were willing to consider such a proposal – Hitler because this was the only way in which he could come to power if he failed to win an outright majority, and turned his back on a putsch; and the group around the President, Papen and Schleicher, because this offered the only prospect of recruiting popular support for their rule and the best chance, as they believed, of taking the wind out of the Nazi sails. The elements of a deal were present all the time; the question was, on whose terms – Hitler's or Papen's? Hitler was even less content than in 1923 to be the drummer and leave the decisions to the gentlemen and the generals. On the other side, Papen and Schleicher persisted in believing that they could get Nazi support for less than Hitler demanded. Each side therefore tried to blockade the other. When Papen could not get Nazi support on his terms, he left them to cool their heels, calculating that the strain on the Party of continued frustration would force Hitler to reduce his demands. Hitler, on his side, tried to stick it out without capitulating. This is the underlying pattern of events in the latter half of 1932. Superimposed on it is a second pattern created by the fact that both sides, the group around the President and the Nazi leaders, became divided on the right tactics to pursue; on one side this is represented by a split between Papen and Schleicher, on the other side by the quarrel between Hitler and Gregor Strasser.

With this in mind, the period from Papen's Chancellorship to Hitler's can be divided into four sections.

The first, from Brüning's resignation on 30 May 1932 to the Reichstag elections on 31 July.

The second, from the Reichstag election of July to those of 6 November 1932.

The third, from the Reichstag elections of November to the

beginning of Schleicher's Chancellorship on 2 December 1932. The fourth, from Schleicher's Chancellorship to Hitler's, which began on 30 January 1933.

The first of these periods was inconclusive, indeed was bound to be so. For, until the elections had been held, neither side was able to gauge its own or the other's strength. Hitler was still hopeful that the elections, the first elections for the Reichstag since September 1930, might bring him an outright majority. At the Mecklenburg provincial elections on 5 June the Nazis polled forty-nine per cent of the votes, and in Hesse, later in the month, forty-four per cent. The tide still appeared to be running in their favour.

Papen dissolved the Reichstag on 4 June, and fixed the new elections for the last day of July. Even this brief delay aroused Nazi suspicions; and when the lifting of the S.A. ban was postponed until the middle of the month, relations between Hitler and the new Government became strained. On 5 June Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'We must disassociate ourselves at the earliest possible moment from the temporary bourgeois Cabinet.' When Hitler saw Papen on the 9th, he made no pretence of his attitude. 'I regard your Cabinet,' he told the Chancellor,' only as a temporary solution and will continue my efforts to make my party the strongest in the country. The Chancellorship will then devolve on me.'[1] There was considerable grumbling in the Party at a 'compromise with Reaction'. Unless the Nazis were to be tarred with the same brush, and to leave to the parties of the Left a monopoly of attacking the 'Cabinet of Barons', they had to assert their independence.

When the ban on the S.A. was lifted, Thaelmann, the Communist leader, described it as an open provocation to murder. This proved to be literally true, for, in the weeks which followed, murder and violence became everyday occurrences in the streets of the big German cities. According to Grzesinski, the Police President of Berlin at the time, there were 461 political riots in Prussia alone between 1 June and 20 July 1932, in which eighty-two people were killed and four hundred seriously wounded.[2] The fiercest fighting was between the Nazis and the Communists; of eighty-six people killed in July 1932, thirty were Communists and thirty-eight Nazis. Provocation was certainly not confined to

1. Franz von Papen: *Memoirs* (London, 1952), p. 162.
2. Albert Grzesinski: *Inside Germany* (N.Y., 1939), c. 10.

one side: on an election visit to the Ruhr in July, Goebbels was given a rough reception, and the funerals of S.A. men became the occasion of big Nazi demonstrations. Pitched battles took place on Sunday 10 July in which eighteen people were killed. The next Sunday, the 17th, saw the worst riot of the summer, at Altona, near 'Red' Hamburg, where the Nazis under police escort staged a march through the working-class districts of the town, and were met by a fusillade of shots from the roofs and windows, which they immediately returned. Nineteen people were reported to have been killed and two hundred and eighty-five wounded on that day alone.

The Altona riots gave Papen the excuse he needed to end the political deadlock in Prussia, where the Social-Democratic and Centre coalition remained in office without a majority in the Diet. On the flimsy pretext that the Prussian Government could not be relied on to deal firmly with the Communists, Papen used the President's emergency powers on 20 July to depose the Prussian Ministers, appointing himself as Reich Commissioner for Prussia, and Bracht, the Burgomaster of Essen, as his Deputy and Prussian Minister of the Interior. By this action Papen hoped partly to conciliate the Nazis, partly to steal some of the Nazi thunder against 'Marxism'. To carry out his plan Papen had stretched the constitutional powers of the President to the limit, and Karl Severing, the Social Democratic Minister of the Interior in Prussia, required a show of force before he was prepared to yield. But it was only a show. The trade unions and the Social Democratic Party, which had defeated the Kapp Putsch in 1920 by a general strike, discussed the possibility of another such strike, only to reject it. Whether they were right to yield or should have resisted, and what would have been their chances of success, has been much debated since.[1] Whatever view one takes of the Labour leaders' action, however, the fact that the two largest working-class organizations in Germany, the Social Democratic Party and the trade unions, had not put up even a token resistance in face of Papen's *coup d'état*, was a significant pointer to the opposition (or lack of it) which Hitler might expect to meet if he came to power.

The removal of the Prussian Government, even if it was only the logical sequel to the defeat of the Government parties at the Prussian elections of April 1932, was a heavy blow to those who

1. The writer found Herr Severing still ready to defend his course of action when he talked to him at Bielefeld in July 1945. Cf. also his memoirs *Mein Lebensweg* (Köln, 1950), vol. II.

still remained loyal to the Weimar Republic. The republican parties were shown to be on the defensive and lacking the conviction to offer more than a passive resistance. However much Papen and Schleicher might claim the credit of this show of energy for the new government, in fact any blow which discredited democratic and constitutional government must bring advantage to the Nazis and the Communists, the two extremist parties. The impression that events favoured the triumph of one or other form of extremism was strengthened, and helped both parties to win votes at the coming elections.

The elections were held on the last day of July. Goebbels had been making his preparations since the beginning of May and the fourth election compaign in five months found the Nazi organization at the top of its form. The argument that things must change, and the promise that, if the Nazis came to power, they would, proved a powerful attraction in a country driven to the limit of endurance by two years of economic depression and mass unemployment, made worse by the inability of the Government to relieve the nation's ills. It was the spirit of revolt engendered by these conditions to which Nazism gave expression, unhampered by the doctrinaire teaching and class exclusiveness of Communism.

'The rise of National Socialism,' Gregor Strasser said in the Reichstag on 10 May, 'is the protest of a people against a State that denies the right to work and the revival of natural intercourse. If the machinery for distribution in the present economic system of the world is incapable of properly distributing the productive wealth of nations, then that system is false and must be altered. The important part of the present development is the anti-capitalist sentiment that is permeating our people; it is the protest of the people against a degenerate economic system. It demands from the State that, in order to secure its own right to live, it shall break with the Demons Gold, World Economy, Materialism, and with the habit of thinking in export statistics and the bank rate, and shall be capable of restoring honest payment for honest labour. This anti-capitalist sentiment is a proof that we are on the eve of a great change – the conquest of Liberalism and the rise of new ways of economic thought and of a new conception of the State.'[1]

It may well be asked how Strasser's speech was to be reconciled

1. Quoted in Heiden: *History of National Socialism*, p. 188.

with Hitler's talk to the industrialists at Düsseldorf a few months before, or what precisely the Nazis meant by 'new ways of economic thought and a new conception of the State'. In 1932, however, large sections of the German people were in no mood to criticize the contradictions of the Nazi programme, but were attracted by the radicalism of its appeal and the violence of its protest against a system which – whatever was to be put in its place – they passionately desired to see overthrown.

This sentiment was exploited by skilful electioneering. 'Once more eternally on the move,' Goebbels complained on 1 July. 'Work has to be done standing, walking, driving, flying. The most urgent conferences are held on the stairs, in the hall, at the door, or on the way to the station. It nearly drives one out of one's senses. One is carried by train, motor-car, and aeroplane criss-cross through Germany. . . . The audience generally has no idea of what the speaker has already gone through during the day before he makes his speech in the evening. . . . And in the meantime he is struggling with the heat, to find the right word, with the sequence of a thought, with a voice that is growing hoarse, with unfortunate acoustics and with the bad air that reaches him from the tightly packed audience of thousands of people.'[1]

The whole familiar apparatus of Nazi ballyhoo was brought into play – placards, Press, sensational charges and counter-charges, mass meetings, demonstrations, S.A. parades. As a simple feat of physical endurance, the speaking programme of men like Hitler and Goebbels was remarkable. Again Hitler took to the skies, and in the third 'Flight over Germany' visited and spoke in close on fifty towns in the second half of July. Delayed by bad weather, Hitler reached one of his meetings, near Stralsund, at half past two in the morning. A crowd of thousands waited patiently for him in drenching rain. When he finished speaking they saluted the dawn with the mass-singing of *Deutschland über Alles*. This was more than clever electioneering. The Nazi campaign could not have succeeded as it did by the ingenuity of its methods alone, if it had not at the same time corresponded and appealed to the mood of a considerable proportion of the German people.

When the results were announced on the night of 31 July the Nazis had outstripped all their competitors, and with 13,745,000 votes and 230 seats in the Reichstag had more than doubled the support they had won at the elections of September 1930. They

1. Goebbels: pp. 116–17.

were now by far the largest party in Germany, their nearest rivals, the Social Democrats, polling just under eight million votes, the Communists five and a quarter million, and the Centre four and a half. Taking 1928 as the measuring rod, the gains made by Hitler – close on thirteen million votes in four years – are still more striking. If he had done little to shake the solid bloc of Social Democratic and Centre votes, he had taken away some six million votes from the parties to the Right of them and captured the greater part of the six million new voters. The mass support of the Nazis in 1932 came from those who had voted in 1928 for the middle-class parties, like the People's Party, the Democrats, and the Economic Party, whose combined vote of 5,582,500 in 1928 had sunk to 954,700 in 1932; from the Nationalist Party, which had lost a million and a half votes; from young people, many without jobs, voting for the first time; and from those who had not voted before, but had been stirred by events and by propaganda to come to the polls this time.

The second period began therefore with a resounding success for the Nazis, but a success which remained inconclusive, and left Papen and Hitler free to put very different interpretations on the situation. For the Nazi vote (37·3 per cent) still fell short of the clear majority for which they had hoped. Moreover, although the Nazis' figures showed an increase in votes, the rate of increase was dropping:

September 1930 (Reichstag)	18·3 per cent of votes cast
March 1932 (1st presidential election)	30 „ „ „ „ „
April 1932 (2nd presidential election)	36·7 „ „ „ „ „
April 1932 (Prussian Diet)	36·3 „ „ „ „ „
July 1932 (Reichstag)	37·3 „ „ „ „ „

As the British Ambassador remarked in a dispatch to the Foreign Secretary: 'Hitler seems now to have exhausted his reserves. He has swallowed up the small bourgeois parties of the Middle and the Right, and there is no indication that he will be able to effect a breach in the Centre, Communist, and Socialist parties. . . . All the other parties are naturally gratified by Hitler's failure to reach anything like a majority on this occasion, especially as they are convinced that he has now reached his zenith.'[1]

From the point of view, however, of a deal with Papen and Schleicher, Hitler felt himself to be in a very strong position. The

1. Sir H. Rumbold to Sir J. Simon, 3 August 1932: *Brit. Doc.*, 2nd series, vol. IV, No. 8.

Nationalist and People's parties, to which alone the Government could look for support apart from the Nazis, had again lost votes, and together held no more than 44 out of a total of 608 seats. The combined strength of the two extremist parties, the Nazi and the Communists (230 and 89), added up to more than fifty per cent of the Reichstag, sufficient to make government with parliament impossible, unless the Nazis could be brought to support the Government. With a voting strength of 13,700,000 electors, a party membership of over a million and a private army of 400,000 S.A. and S.S., Hitler was the most powerful political leader in Germany, knocking on the doors of the Chancellery at the head of the most powerful political party Germany had ever seen.

Inflamed by the election campaign, and believing that the long-awaited day was within sight, the S.A. threatened to get out of hand. On 8 August, Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'The air is full of presage. . . . The whole party is ready to take over power. The S.A. down everyday tools to prepare for this. If things go well, everything is all right. If they do not, it will be an awful setback.' Two days later: 'The S.A. is in readiness for an alarm and is standing to. . . . The S.A. are closely concentrated round Berlin; the manoeuvre is carried out with imposing precision and discipline.' The outbreaks of street-shooting and bomb-throwing flared up, especially in the eastern provinces of Silesia, and East Prussia. In the first nine days of August a score of incidents was reported every day, culminating on 9 August in the murder at Potempa, a village in Silesia, of a Communist called Pietrzuch, who was brutally kicked to death by five Nazis in front of his mother. The same day Papen's Government announced the death penalty for clashes which led to people being killed. The Nazis at once protested indignantly.

Aware of the highly charged feeling in the Party, Hitler took time before he moved. He held a conference of his leaders at Tegernsee, in Bavaria, on 2 August, but arrived at no final decision. A coalition with the Centre Party would provide a majority in the Reichstag, but Hitler was in a mood for 'all-or-nothing'. He must have the whole power, not a share of it. On 5 August he saw General von Schleicher at Fürstenberg, north of Berlin, and put his demands before him: the Chancellorship for himself, and other Nazis at the head of the Prussian State Government, the Reich, and Prussian Ministries of the Interior

(which controlled the police). With these were to go the Ministry of Justice and a new Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, which was reserved for Goebbels. An Enabling Bill, giving Hitler full power to govern by decree, would be presented to the Reichstag; if the Chamber refused to pass it, it would be dissolved. Whatever Schleicher said, Hitler came away in high hopes that the General would use all his influence to secure the Chancellorship for him. He was so pleased that he suggested to Schleicher a tablet should be affixed to the walls of the house to commemorate their historic meeting. He then returned to Berchtesgaden to await events.

On 9 August, Strasser and Frick joined him there with disquieting news. The violent behaviour of the S.A. and some of the wilder election and post-election statements were making people ask if the Nazis were fit to have power. Funk, who arrived with a message from Schacht, confirmed this. Business and industrial circles were becoming worried lest a Hitler Chancellorship should lead to radical economic experiments on the lines Gottfried Feder and Gregor Strasser had often threatened. Still no word came from Berlin.

On 11 August Hitler decided to bring matters to a head.[1] Sending messengers ahead to arrange for him to see the Chancellor and the President, he left the mountains, and, after a further conference with his lieutenants on the shores of the Chiemsee, motored north to Berlin. Goebbels summed up the results of the conference: 'If they do not afford us the opportunity to square accounts with Marxism, our taking over power is absolutely useless.'[2] This assurance was Hitler's sop to the impatient S.A.

Late in the evening of the 12th Hitler reached Berlin and drove out to Goebbels's house at Caputh, to avoid being seen. Röhm had already visited Papen and Schleicher and had asked bluntly who was to be Chancellor. Had Hitler misunderstood Schleicher? The answer Röhm had been given was none too satisfactory. After Goebbels told him the news, Hitler paced up and down for a long time, uneasily calculating his chances. A hundred times he must have asked himself whether he was pitching his claims too high. On the other hand, to pitch them lower, to agree to

1. Other accounts say that Hitler was summoned to Berlin by telegram, but Meissner states in his affidavit (Nuremberg Document 3309-PS) that the interview with the President was at the personal request of Hitler, transmitted to Meissner by Hitler's adjutant, Brückner.

2. Goebbels: p. 136.

anything less than full power, was to court trouble with the Party and the S.A. Hitler went to bed late, after listening to some music; the decisive meeting with Papen and Schleicher was fixed for the next day at noon.

What had been happening on the Government side of the fence since the elections is more difficult to follow. Despite the failure of the two parties he had counted on for support – the Nationalists and the People's Party – Papen was less impressed by Hitler's success than might have been expected. Hitler had failed to win the majority he hoped for, and Papen could argue that the results of the elections and the divisions in the Reichstag were such as to justify the continuation of a presidential cabinet, independent of the incoherent Party groupings. Indeed, Papen saw no reason at all why he should resign in Hitler's favour. He enjoyed the favour of the President as no one ever had before, and the President certainly had no wish to exchange the urbane and charming Papen for a man whom he disliked and regarded as 'queer'. Nazi violence during and after the election had hardened opinion against them, not only in the circle round the President, but among the propertied classes generally, and, most important of all, in the Army. Reports from abroad of the possible repercussions of Hitler's advent to power had impressed the Cabinet and the Army, while for the President it was quite enough that Hitler had broken his promise and attacked a government he had undertaken to support. Finally, Papen, like most other political observers, was convinced that the Nazis had reached their peak and from now on would begin to lose votes. If he was still prepared to do a deal with Hitler it must be on his, and not Hitler's, terms.

Schleicher's attitude too had changed since the meeting at Fürstenberg on the 5th. When Hitler met the General and Papen together on the 13th, the most they were prepared to offer him was the Vice-Chancellorship, together with the Prussian Ministry of the Interior for one of his lieutenants. Hitler's claim to power as the leader of the largest party in the Reichstag was politely set aside. The President, Papen told him, insisted on maintaining a presidential cabinet in power and this could not be headed by a Party leader like Hitler. Hitler rejected Papen's offer out of hand, lost his temper and began to shout. He must have the whole power, nothing less. He talked wildly of mowing down the Marxists, of a St Bartholomew's Night, and of three days' freedom of the streets for the S.A. Both Papen and Schleicher were

shocked by the raging uncontrolled figure who now confronted them. They were scarcely reassured by his declaration that he wanted neither the Foreign Ministry nor the Ministry of Defence, but only as much power as Mussolini had claimed in 1922. While Hitler meant by this a coalition government, including non-Fascists, such as Mussolini had originally formed, they understood him to be claiming a dictatorship in which he would govern alone without them – and, as the history of Hitler's Chancellorship in 1933 was later to show, they were fundamentally right.

After prolonged and heated argument, Hitler left in a rage of disappointment, and drove back to Goebbels's flat on the Reichskanzlerplatz. When a telephone call came from the President's Palace at three o'clock, Frick or Goebbels answered that there was no point in Hitler coming, as a decision had already been arrived at. But the President insisted. Nothing, it was said, would be finally decided till he had seen Hitler – and Hitler, angry and shaken, went.

The President received him standing up and leaning on his stick. His manner was cold. Hitler's argument that he sought power by legal means, but to obtain his ends must be given full control over government policy, made no impression on the old man. According to Meissner, who was one of those present at the interview, the President retorted that in the present tense situation he could not take the risk of transferring power to a new Party which did not command a majority and which was intolerant, noisy, and undisciplined.

At this point Hindenburg, with a certain show of excitement, referred to several recent occurrences – clashes between the Nazis and the police, acts of violence committed by Hitler's followers against those of different opinions, excesses against Jews and other illegal acts. All these incidents had strengthened him in his conviction that there were numerous wild elements in the Party beyond effective control. Conflicts with other states had also to be avoided under all circumstances. Hindenburg proposed to Hitler that he should cooperate with the other parties, in particular with the Right and the Centre, and that he should give up the one-sided idea that he must have complete power. In cooperating with other parties he would be able to show what he could achieve and improve upon. If he could show positive results, he would acquire increasing influence even in a coalition government. This would also be the best way to eliminate the widespread fear that a National Socialist government would make ill use of its power. Hindenburg added that he was ready to accept Hitler and his movement in a coalition government, the precise composition of which could be a subject of

negotiation, but that he could not take the responsibility of giving exclusive power to Hitler alone. . . . Hitler, however, was adamant in his refusal to put himself in the position of bargaining with the leaders of the other parties and of facing a coalition government.[1]

Before the interview was over Hindenburg took the chance to remind Hitler of the promise, which he had now broken, to support Papen's Government. In the words of the communiqué, 'he gravely exhorted Herr Hitler to conduct the opposition on the part of the N.S. Party in a chivalrous manner, and to bear in mind his responsibility to the Fatherland and to the German people.' For once, the Nazi propaganda machine was caught off its guard, and the Government's damaging version of the meeting was on the streets and half-way round the world before the Nazis realized what was happening. It spoke of Hitler's 'demand for entire and complete control of the State'; described the President's refusal to hand over power to 'a movement which had the intention of using it in a one-sided manner'; referred explicitly to Hitler's disregard of the promises of support he had given before the election, and repeated Hindenburg's warning to him on the way to conduct opposition. Hitler's humiliation in the eyes of the world, and of his own Party, was complete.

VI

If ever Hitler needed confidence in his own judgement, it was now. A false move could have destroyed his chances of success, and it was easy to make such a move. The policy of legality appeared discredited and bankrupt. Hitler had won such electoral support as no other party had had in Germany since the First World War, he had kept strictly to the letter of the Constitution and knocked on the door of the Chancellery, only to have the door publicly slammed in his face. The way in which his demands had been refused touched Hitler on a raw spot; once again he had been treated as not quite good enough, an uneducated, rough sort of fellow whom one could scarcely make Chancellor. This was Lossow, Kahr, and Munich all over again, and his old hatred and contempt for the bourgeoisie and their respectable politicians – top-hat, frock-coat, the *Herr Doktor* with his diploma – flared up.

1. Affidavit of Otto Meissner, Chief of the Presidential Chancery, 1920–45, at Nuremberg, 28 November 1945. N.D. 3309-PS. Cf. also Otto Meissner: *Staatssekretär*, pp. 239–41.

He was angry and resentful, feeling he had walked into a trap and was being laughed at by the superior people who had made a fool of him. He had made the mistake of playing his cards too high; now his bluff had been called and, instead of sweeping into power, he had had to stand and listen to the President giving him a dressing-down for bad manners and behaviour not becoming a gentleman. In such a mood there was a great temptation to show them he was not bluffing, to give the S.A. their head, and let the smug bourgeois politicians see whether he was just a 'revolutionary of the big mouth', as Goebbels had once called Strasser.

There was strong pressure from the Party in the same direction. A considerable section, strongly represented in the S.A., had always disliked the policy of legality, and had only been constrained to submit to it with difficulty. Now that legality had led to an open set-back and humiliation they were even more restive and critical. The difficulties with which Hitler was confronted are vividly illustrated by the case of the Potempa murderers. The five Nazis responsible for the murder of the Communist miner, Pietrzuch, were sentenced to death on 22 August. All five men were members of the S.A., and the case had attracted the widest publicity. The S.A. were furious: this was to place the nationally-minded Nazis and the anti-national Communists on the same footing, the very reverse of what Hitler and the Nazis meant by justice. Hitler had therefore to choose between offending public opinion and travestying his own policy of legality if he came out on the side of the murderers, or risking a serious loss of confidence on the part of the S.A. if he failed to intervene on their behalf, thus publicly admitting his inability to defend his own followers. Hitler's answer was to send a telegram to the five murderers: 'My comrades: in the face of this most monstrous and bloody sentence I feel myself bound to you in limitless loyalty. From this moment, your liberation is a question of our honour. To fight against a government which could allow this is our duty.' He followed this with a violent manifesto in which he attacked Papen for deliberately setting on foot a persecution of the 'nationally minded' elements in Germany: 'German fellow countrymen: whoever among you agrees with our struggle for the honour and liberty of the nation will understand why I refused to take office in this Cabinet. . . . Herr von Papen, I understand your bloody "objectivity" now. I wish that victory may come to nationalist Germany and destruction upon its Marxist destroyers and spoilers, but I am certainly not fitted to be the executioner of

nationalist fighters for the liberty of the German people.'[1] Röhm visited the condemned men and assured them they would not be executed. Nor was this an idle boast: a few days after Hitler's telegram their sentences were commuted to imprisonment for life.

There is no doubt that Hitler's action shocked German public opinion, for the justice of the sentence scarcely admitted dispute. Yet this was the price which Hitler had to pay if he meant to keep his movement together and preserve his own authority. Nor is there any reason to suppose that he felt the least compunction about the murder at Potempa; the publicity it had received was inconvenient, but kicking a political opponent to death was well within the bounds of what Hitler meant by legality.

Nevertheless, although the Nazi Press and Nazi speeches show an increasing radicalism from August up to the second Reichstag elections in November, and although Hitler came out in uncompromising opposition to Papen's Government, he still refused to depart from his tactics of legality, or to let himself be provoked into the risk of attempting a seizure of power by force. The very day of his humiliating interview with the President he called in Röhm and the other S.A. leaders to insist that they must give up any idea of a putsch. Goebbels, recording the meeting, adds: 'Their task is the most difficult. Who knows if their units will be able to hold together. . . . The S.A. Chief of Staff (Röhm) stays with us for a long time. He is extremely worried about the S.A.'[2] To this line of policy Hitler remained faithful throughout; he was determined to avoid open conflict with the Army and to come to power legally. The situation was not yet ripe, he told Goebbels; Papen and the President were not yet convinced that they would have to take him on his own terms, but it was still to a deal, and not to revolution, that he looked as the means to power.

Shortly after the Potempa incident Hermann Rauschning, one of the leaders of the Danzig Senate, visited Hitler at Haus Wachenfeld on the Obersalzberg. The little party from Danzig found him moody and preoccupied, sitting on the veranda and staring out over the mountain landscape. His silence was interspersed with excited and violent comments, many of them on the character of the next war. Much of it was prophetic; he laid great stress upon the psychological and subversive preparations for war – if these were carried out with care, peace would be signed before

1. Heiden: *History of National Socialism*, p. 182.
2. Goebbels: pp. 139–40.

the war had begun. 'The place of artillery preparation for frontal attack will in future be taken by revolutionary propaganda, to break down the enemy psychologically before the armies begin to function at all. . . . How to achieve the moral break-down of the enemy before the war has started – that is the problem that interests me. . . . We shall provoke a revolution in France as certainly as we shall *not* have one in Germany. The French will hail me as their deliverer. The little man of the middle class will acclaim us as the bearers of a just social order and eternal peace. None of these people any longer want war or greatness.'[1] Rauschning could get little out of Hitler about the current political situation. He was angry and uncertain, 'divided', Rauschning thought, 'between his own revolutionary temperament which impelled him to passionate action, and his political astuteness which warned him to take the safe road of political combination and postpone his revenge till later.'[2] Hitler talked much of ruthlessness and was inclined to lash out at anyone who irritated him. He was scornful and impatient of economic problems on which Rauschning tried to draw him: if the will were there the problems would solve themselves, he retorted. Only when they came to discuss Danzig did Hitler show any interest in the actual position in Germany. His first question was whether Danzig had an extradition agreement with Germany, and it was soon clear that his mind was occupied with the possibility of having to go underground, if the Government should move against the Party and ban it. In that case Danzig, with its independent status under the League of Nations, might well offer a useful asylum.

As they left to drive to Munich Goebbels came stumping up the path to the house, summoned from Berlin for more anxious consultations on the policy to be pursued if the Party was to get out of the political cul-de-sac into which it had been manoeuvred.

Desultory contacts with the Government continued through the rest of the summer and into the autumn, but they led nowhere. Papen was still confident that by a process of 'wearing-down' the Nazis, by keeping them waiting on the threshold of power, he could force Hitler to accept his terms. It was a question of who would crack first.

In August and September the Nazis made an approach to the Centre Party: together they could command a majority in the

1. Hermann Rauschning: *Hitler Speaks* (London, 1939), pp. 19–21.
2. ibid., p. 27.

Reichstag, and Hitler, amongst other proposals, suggested that they should put through a joint motion deposing the President and providing for a new election. On 25 August Goebbels noted: 'We have got into touch with the Centre Party, if merely by way of bringing pressure to bear upon our adversaries. . . . There are three possibilities. Firstly: Presidential Cabinet. Secondly: Coalition. Thirdly: Opposition. . . . In Berlin I ascertain that Schleicher already knows of our feelers in the direction of the Centre. That is a way of bringing pressure to bear on him. I endorse and further it. Perhaps we shall succeed thus in expediting the first of these solutions.'[1] One practical result of these talks was the election of Göring to the presidency of the Reichstag by the combined votes of the Nazis, the Centre, and the Nationalists on 30 August.

Papen refused to be impressed by the threat of a Nazi–Centre combination against him. He was firmly convinced that the prolongation of the deadlock was working to the disadvantage of the Nazis, and that in any new elections they were bound to lose votes. He believed that, in the threat to dissolve the Reichstag and force a further appeal to the country, he held the ace of trumps, and, if necessary, he was resolved to play it.

The climax of these weeks of intrigue and manoeuvring came on 12 September. After the election of Göring to its presidency on 30 August the Reichstag had adjourned until the 12th, the first full session since the elections at the end of July. Foreseeing trouble, the Chancellor procured a decree for the Chamber's dissolution from the President in advance. With this up his sleeve, he felt in complete command of the situation. The actual course of events on 12 September, however, took both sides by surprise. When the session opened, before a crowded audience in the diplomatic and public galleries, the Communist deputy Torgler moved a vote of censure on the Government as an amendment to the Order of the Day. It had been agreed amongst the other parties that there was nothing to be gained by such a move, and that one of the Nationalist deputies should formally oppose it, the objection of one member being sufficient to prevent an amendment to the Order of the Day without due notice. When the moment came, however, the Nationalists made no move, and amid a puzzled and embarrassed silence Frick rose to his feet to ask for half an hour's delay. In the excited crowd which filled the lobbies and corridors it was said that Papen had decided to

1. Goebbels: pp. 142–3.

dissolve, and that it was in agreement with him that the Nationalists had gone back on the original plan. At a hurried meeting in the palace of the Reichstag President, Göring, Hitler, Strasser, and Frick decided to out-smart the Chancellor, vote with the Communists, and defeat the Government before the Chamber could be dissolved.

Immediately the deputies had taken their seats again Göring, as President, announced that a vote would be taken at once on the Communist motion of no-confidence. Papen, rising in protest, requested the floor. But Göring, studiously affecting not to see the Chancellor, looked in the other direction, and the voting began. White with anger, Papen produced the traditional red portfolio which contained the decree of dissolution, thrust it on Göring's table, then ostentatiously marched out of the Chamber accompanied by the other members of his cabinet. Still Göring had no eyes for anything but the voting. The Communist vote of no-confidence was carried by 513 votes to 32, and Göring promptly declared the Government overthrown. As for the scrap of paper laid on his desk, which he now found time to read, it was, he declared, obviously worthless since it had been countersigned by a Chancellor who had now been deposed.

Whether – as the Nazis affected to believe – the elaborate farce in the Reichstag, and the almost unanimous vote against him, had really damaged Papen or not, for the moment the Chancellor had the advantage. For Papen insisted that, as the decree of dissolution had already been signed and placed on the table before the vote took place, the result of the motion was invalid. The Reichstag was dissolved, after sitting for less than a day, and the Nazis faced the fifth major electoral contest of the year.

Privately they were only too well aware that Papen was right and that they must count on a reduced vote. Hitler refused to consider a compromise, and accepted von Papen's challenge, but there was no disguising the fact that this would be the toughest fight of all. On 16 September Goebbels wrote with a heavy heart: 'Now we are in for elections again! One sometimes feels this sort of thing is going on for ever. . . . Our adversaries count on our losing morale, and getting fagged out. But we know this and will not oblige them. We would be lost and all our work would have been in vain if we gave in now . . . , even if the struggle should seem hopeless.'[1] A month later he admitted: 'The organization

1. Goebbels: p. 157.

has naturally become a bit on edge through these everlasting elections. It is as jaded as a battalion which has been too long in the trenches, and just as nervy. The numerous difficulties are wearing me out.'[1]

One of the worst difficulties was lack of money. Four elections since March had eaten deep into the Party's resources, and the invaluable contributions from outside had lately begun to dwindle. Hitler's refusal to come to terms, his arrogant claim for the whole power, his condonation of violence at Potempa, the swing towards Radicalism in the campaign against the 'Government of Reaction' – all these factors, combined, no doubt, with strong hints from von Papen to industrial and business circles not to ease the blockade, had placed the Party in a tight spot. In the middle of October Goebbels complained: 'Money is extraordinarily difficult to obtain. All gentlemen of "Property and Education" are standing by the Government.'[2]

In these circumstances it was only Hitler's determination and leadership that kept the Party going. His confidence in himself never wavered. When the Gauleiters assembled at Munich early in October he used all his arts to put new life and energy into them. 'He is great and surpasses us all,' Goebbels wrote enthusiastically. 'He raises the Party's spirits out of the blackest depression. With him as leader the movement must succeed.'

Another picture of the Nazi leader at this time is given by Kurt Ludecke.[3] Ludecke had gone to visit Hitler in Munich at the end of September, and, after an evening spent in Hitler's company at his Munich flat listening to him denounce the influence of Christianity, he accompanied him by car to a mass Hitler Youth demonstration at Potsdam.

Ludecke found Hitler imperturbable and confident, already talking of what he would do when he became Chancellor. They started out from Munich in the late afternoon in three powerful Mercedes, one of them filled with Hitler's bodyguard of eight, armed with revolvers and hippopotamus whips, under the command of Sepp Dietrich, later to achieve fame as an S.S. general. Hitler, although he never took the wheel himself, had a passion for speed, and they drove fast across Bavaria towards the frontiers of Saxony. Ludecke talked about America, and Hitler, who had never been out of Germany, questioned him eagerly. As a boy

1. Goebbels, pp. 171–2. 2. ibid., p. 172.
3. Kurt Ludecke: *I Knew Hitler*, c. 27–8.

he had read Karl May's stories about the Red Indians, and they found a common interest in the adventures of Old Shatterhand and Winnetou. Every time Hitler dozed he would rouse himself again: 'Go on, go on – I mustn't fall asleep. I'm listening.' At Nuremberg Julius Streicher was waiting, while at Berneck, where they paused for a brief sleep in an inn, Göring met them and stayed talking with Hitler until 4 a.m. Soon after nine they were on the road again, a road of which Hitler knew every bend and dip, halting for a picnic lunch and then driving through the Communist districts of Saxony. At one point they passed a line of trucks filled with Communist demonstrators. 'We slowed down. It was apparent that because of the state of the road we were going to have to pass them at low speed. I could see Sepp Dietrich whistling through his teeth. Everybody stopped talking, and I noticed that the right hand of each of the men in the car in front disappeared at his side. We crept by. Everyone, the Führer included, looked straight into the faces of the Communists.' He was recognized and hissed at, but nobody dared to interfere with the bodyguard.

At Potsdam more than a hundred thousand boys and girls of the Hitler Youth had gathered in the torch-lit stadium. After a brief address Hitler spent the rest of the night trying to find accommodation for the thousands who had arrived unexpectedly. In the morning the review began at eleven o'clock on a sunny October day. From then until six o'clock in the evening, for seven hours, Hitler stood to take the salute as the steady columns of brown-shirted Hitler Youth marched past him. Once he came over to Ludecke and said: 'You see? No fear – the German race is on the march.' Later that night, after Hitler had dined with Prince Auwi, one of the Kaiser's sons who had joined the S.A., Ludecke saw him again in the train for Munich. 'As we stepped into the railway carriage, Brückner, Hitler's adjutant, blocked the way: "Leave him alone," he said. "The man's played out." He was sitting in the corner of the compartment, utterly spent. Hitler motioned weakly to us to come in. He looked for a second into my eyes, clasped my hand feebly, and I left.

'When next I saw him he was Chancellor.'[1]

The genuineness of the Nazis' radical campaign against the 'caste government of Reaction' was put to the test a few days before the election by the outbreak of a transport strike in Berlin. The strike was caused by a cut in wages as part of Papen's policy

1. Ludecke: pp. 478–9.

of meeting the crisis. It was disavowed by the Social Democrats and the Trade Unions, but was backed by the Communists. To many people's surprise the Nazis joined the Communists in supporting the strikers. Goebbels, in his diary, is quite frank about the reasons: 'The entire Press is furious with us and calls it Bolshevism; but as a matter of fact we had no option. If we had held ourselves aloof from this strike our position among the working classes would have been shaken. Here a great occasion offers once again of demonstrating to the public that the line we have taken up in politics is dictated by a true sympathy with the people, and for this reason the N.S. party purposely eschews the old bourgeois methods.'[1]

The Nazi move, however, had other consequences as well. The next day Goebbels wrote: 'Scarcity of money has become chronic. . . . The strike is grist to the mill of the bourgeois Press. They are exploiting it against us unconscionably. Many of our staunch partisans, even, are beginning to have their doubts. . . . The consequences of the strike are daily putting us into new predicaments.'[2]

The election campaign came to an end on the evening of 5 November. 'Last attack,' Goebbels commented. 'Desperate drive of the Party against defeat. We succeed in obtaining ten thousand marks at the very last moment. These are to be thrown into the campaign on Saturday afternoon. We have done all possible. Now let Fate decide.'[3]

VII

The Nazi leaders were under no illusions about the election results. The fifth election of the year found a mood of stubborn apathy growing among the German people, a feeling of indifference and disbelief, against which propaganda and agitation beat in vain. It was precisely on this that Papen had calculated and his calculation was not far wrong. For the first time since 1930 the Nazis lost votes, two millions of the 13,745,000 they had polled in July 1932, cutting their percentage from 37·3 to 33·1. Their seats in the Reichstag were reduced from 230 out of 608 to 196 out of 584, although they still remained by far the largest party in the Chamber.

1. Goebbels: 2 November, p. 181. 2. ibid., p. 182.
3. ibid., p. 184.

This set-back was thrown into sharper relief by the success of two other parties. The Nationalists, who had been steadily losing votes since 1924, suddenly raised the number of their seats from 37 to 52, and the Communists, who polled close on six million votes, secured a hundred seats in the Reichstag. The Communist success was particularly striking for it showed that the Nazis were beginning to lose their hold on that current of revolt which had so far carried them forward. It was no secret that the bulk of the Communists' new voters were disillusioned supporters of the Nazis and the Social Democrats, looking for a genuinely revolutionary party.

Papen was delighted with the results, which he regarded as a moral victory for his government and a heavier defeat for Hitler than the figures actually showed. The Nazi movement had always claimed to be different from the other parties, to be a movement of national resurgence. Now its spell was broken, the emptiness of its claims exposed and Hitler himself reduced to the proportions of any other politician scrambling for power. Its fall, Papen was convinced, would be as rapid as its rise. If Hitler wanted power he had better come to terms before his electoral assets dwindled still further.

At first, therefore, it looked as if the November elections would be followed by a repetition of what had happened after 31 July, with the odds against Hitler lengthened, and a much greater likelihood of his being forced to accept von Papen's terms. In this third period, however, it was Papen who overplayed his hand, with unexpected results.

Determined, in spite of the electoral set-back, not to walk into another trap like that of 13 August, Hitler sat tight and refused to be drawn by Papen's first indirect approaches. On 9 November Goebbels recorded in his diary: 'The Wilhelmstrasse has sent an emissary to the Leader. The same conditions are proposed as those suggested on 13 August (i.e. the Vice-Chancellorship), but he remains inexorable.' Three days later he wrote: 'The Leader is keeping away from Berlin. The Wilhelmstrasse waits for him in vain; and that is well. We must not give in as we did on 13 August.'[1]

On 13 November Papen wrote officially to Hitler suggesting that they should bury their differences and renew negotiations for a concentration of all the nationally minded parties.[2] Hitler let a couple of days pass, and replied at length on the 16th with a

1. Goebbels: pp. 188 and 190. 2. N.D. D.-633.

letter which was an open rebuff. He laid down four conditions for any negotiations: that they should be conducted in writing, so that there could be no disagreement this time about what was said; that the Chancellor should take full responsibility for his actions, and not try to dodge behind the figure of the President as he had in August; that he, Hitler, should be told in advance what policy he was being asked to support, 'since, in spite of the closest consideration, I have never quite understood the present Government's programme'; and, finally, that the Chancellor should assure him that Hugenberg, the leader of the Nationalists, was prepared to enter a national bloc.[1] Hitler's reply ruled out the possibility of any further negotiations between himself and Papen at this stage. Indeed, he had already issued a manifesto immediately after the elections in which, underlining the fact that ninety per cent of the nation were ranged against the Government, he had charged Papen with the responsibility for the increase in the Communist vote. By this reactionary policy, Hitler declared, Papen was driving the masses to Bolshevism. There could be no compromise with such a régime.

While this exchange was taking place, Papen, who was perfectly prepared to plunge the country into still another election in order to force the Nazis to their knees, unexpectedly encountered opposition in his own Cabinet, notably from Schleicher. Not only was Schleicher irritated by Papen's increasing independence and the close relationship he had established with the President, but he began to see in Papen's personal quarrel with Hitler, and his determination to prosecute it to the limit, an obstacle to securing that concentration of the 'national' forces which was, in Schleicher's view, the only reason for ever having made Papen Chancellor. Papen was now beginning to talk confidently of governing the country by a dictatorship, if Hitler would not come to his senses. Schleicher, on the other hand, had not failed to notice the ominous increase in the Communist vote, the growing radicalism of the Nazis and their cooperation with the Communists in the Berlin transport strike. He was more than ever alarmed at the prospect of a civil war in which both the Communists and the Nazis might be on the other side of the barricade. It did not take long for him to reach the conclusion that Papen was becoming more of a hindrance than an asset to the policy of a deal with the Nazis which was still his own objective.

Schleicher found support for his views in the Cabinet, and

1. N.D. D.-634.

Papen was urged to resign, in order to allow the President to consult the Party leaders and try to find a way out of the deadlock, which appeared to be impossible so long as he remained in office. With considerable shrewdness Papen swallowed his anger and agreed; he was confident that, in any case, negotiations with Hitler and the other Party leaders would not remove the deadlock, and that after their failure he would return to office with his hand strengthened. He would then be able to insist on whatever course he saw fit to recommend. His own influence over the President, and the fact that Hindenburg was obviously irritated by the whole affair, saw no reason at all why he should part with Papen, and had become increasingly suspicious of Schleicher, augured well for the success of these calculations. Accordingly, on 17 November, Papen tendered the resignation of his Cabinet, and the President, on his advice, requested Hitler to call on him.

Events followed the course Papen had foreseen. On 18 November Hitler arrived in Berlin and spent some hours in discussion with Goebbels, Frick, and Strasser; Göring was hastily summoned from Rome, where he had been engaged in talks with Mussolini. The next day, cheered by the crowds, Hitler drove to the Palace. The conversation was at least more friendly than the chilly interview of 13 August. He was invited to sit down and stayed for over an hour. A second conference followed on the 21st. The gist of Hindenburg's offer was contained in three sentences from the official record of the discussion on the 21st. 'You have declared,' the President said, 'that you will only place your movement at the disposal of a government of which you, the leader of the Party, are the head. If I consider your proposal, I must demand that such a Cabinet should have a majority in the Reichstag. Accordingly, I ask you, as the leader of the largest party, to ascertain, if and on what conditions, you could obtain a secure workable majority in the Reichstag on a definite programme.'

On the face of it this was a fair offer, but it was so designed as to make it impossible for Hitler to succeed. For Hitler could not secure a majority in the Reichstag. The Centre Party, in view of their vendetta with Papen, might be willing to join a coalition with Hitler – Göring was already engaged in negotiating with the Centre leaders – but Hugenberg and the Nationalists would never come in. In any case, what Hitler wanted was to be made, not a parliamentary Chancellor, shackled by a coalition, but a

presidential Chancellor, with the same sweeping powers as the President had given to Papen. To this the old man sternly refused to agree. If Germany had to be governed by the emergency powers of a presidential Chancellor, then there was no point in replacing Papen; the only argument in favour of his resignation was that Hitler would be able to provide something which Papen had failed to secure, namely, a parliamentary majority.

A lengthy correspondence between Hitler and the President's State Secretary, Meissner, failed to alter the terms of the offer. Papen's presidential Cabinet, Meissner pointed out, had resigned 'because it could not find a majority in parliament to tolerate its measures. Consequently a new presidential Cabinet would be an improvement only if it could eliminate this deficiency.'[1] In his final letter on the 24th Meissner said that the President was unable to give the powers of a presidential Chancellor to a Party leader 'because such a Cabinet is bound to develop into a party dictatorship and increase the state of tension prevailing among the German people.' For this the President could not take the responsibility before his oath and his conscience. Hitler could only retort that the negotiations had been foredoomed to fail in view of Hindenburg's resolve to keep Papen, whatever the cost. There was nothing left but to admit defeat and break off the negotiations. Once again the policy of legality had led to public humiliation; once again the Leader returned from the President's palace empty-handed and out-manoeuvred.

Discussions between the President and other Party leaders produced no better result. But at this point Papen's calculations began to go wrong. For Schleicher, too, had not been idle, and through Gregor Strasser he was now sounding out the possibility of the Nazis joining a Cabinet in which, not Papen, but Schleicher himself would take the Chancellorship. The offer was communicated to Hitler in Munich, and on the evening of 29 November Hitler left by train for the north. According to one version, Hitler was inclined to accept and was already on his way to Berlin when he was intercepted by Göring at Jena, persuaded to go no farther and taken off to Weimar for a conference with the other Nazi leaders. For once the Nazi version, as it is given by Otto Dietrich and Goebbels, seems more probable: according to this, Hitler declined to be drawn by Schleicher's move and called

1. The correspondence is printed in full in *Jahrbuch des öffentlichen Rechts*, vol. 21 (1933–4).

a conference of his chief lieutenants at Weimar, where he was already due to take part in the election campaign for the forthcoming Thuringian elections. At this Weimar conference, on 1 December, Strasser came out strongly in favour of joining a Schleicher Cabinet and found some support from Frick. Göring and Goebbels, however, were opposed to such a course, and Hitler accepted their point of view. A long talk with an officer, Major Ott, whom Schleicher had sent to see Hitler at Weimar, failed to change this decision; Hitler still held out and was only prepared to make a deal on his own terms. Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'Anyone can see that the "System" is breathing its last, and that it would be a crime to form an alliance with it at the present moment.'[1]

Meanwhile, on the evening of 1 December, Schleicher and Papen saw Hindenburg together. Papen's plan was perfectly clear: the attempt to find an alternative government had failed, and he proposed that he should resume office, prorogue the Reichstag indefinitely, and prepare a reform of the constitution to provide for a new electoral law and the establishment of a second Chamber. Until that could be carried out he would proclaim a state of emergency, govern by decree, and use force to smash any opposition. Schleicher's objections were threefold: such a course was unconstitutional; it involved a danger of civil war, since the vast majority of the nation had declared themselves emphatically opposed to Papen in two elections; and it was unnecessary. He announced that he was convinced he himself could obtain a parliamentary majority in the Reichstag.

If Hitler would not join him, he was confident that he could detach Gregor Strasser and as many as sixty Nazi deputies from the Party. To these, Schleicher believed, he could add the middle-class parties and the Social Democrats, and might even win the support of the trade unions.

From the discussion that followed Papen emerged triumphant. The old President was shocked at Schleicher's suggestion and turning to Papen entrusted him, not Schleicher, with the task of forming a new government.[2] But Schleicher had the last word. As he and Papen parted, he used the phrase addressed to Luther on

1. Goebbels: p. 200.

2. Papen's Interrogation at Nuremberg, 3 September 1945; Papen's examination in court, Nuremberg Proceedings, Part XVI, pp. 269–72; and Papen's letter of 10 April 1948, to M. François-Poncet, quoted by Castellan, pp. 20–2.

the eve of his journey to the Diet of Worms: 'Little Monk, you have chosen a difficult path.'

The next day, 2 December, Schleicher played his trump card once again. At a cabinet meeting held at nine o'clock in the evening, he announced that the Army no longer had confidence in Papen and was not prepared to take the risk of civil war – with both the Nazis and the Communists in opposition – which Papen's policy would entail. Developing his argument, Schleicher produced one of his officers, Major Ott (later Hitler's ambassador in Tokyo), to provide detailed evidence in its support. In November Schleicher had ordered the Ministry of Defence to discuss with the police and Army authorities what steps would have to be taken in the event of civil war. Their conclusion was that, in view of the possibility of a surprise attack by Poland at the same time as risings by the Communists and the Nazis and a general strike, the State did not possess sufficient forces to guarantee order. They must therefore recommend the Government not to declare a state of emergency.[1] Whether this was a just appreciation of the situation or not – Schleicher's production of the report at this moment was too pat not to arouse suspicion – his authority as the representative of the Army was incontestable.

Once again the Army had shown itself to be the supreme arbiter in German politics, and Papen was left without a reply. 'I went to Hindenburg,' Papen told the Court at Nuremberg, 'and reported to him. Herr von Hindenburg, deeply stirred by my report, said to me: "I am an old man, and I cannot face a civil war of any sort in my country. If General von Schleicher is of this opinion, then I must – much as I regret it – withdraw the task with which I charged you last night."'[2]

Von Papen had only two consolations, but they were to prove substantial. At last Schleicher, the man who had used his influence behind the scenes to unseat Müller, Groener, Brüning, and now Papen, was forced to come out into the open and assume personal responsibility for the success or failure of his plans. On 2 December General von Schleicher became the last Chancellor of pre-Hitler Germany, and – Papen's second consolation – he took office at a time when his credit with the President, on which he

1. See in addition to the sources already cited, Castellan, pp. 23–5, in which Colonel Ott's account of his report, in a letter of November 1946, is reproduced in full; Meissner's Affidavit, 28 November 1945 (3309-PS), and the report of the British Ambassador, 7 December 1932, in *Brit. Doc.*, Second Series, vol. IV, No. 44.

2. Nuremberg Proceedings, Part XVI, p. 272.

had drawn so lavishly in the past year, was destroyed. The old man, who had tolerated the intrigues which had led to the dismissal of Groener and Brüning, neither forgot nor forgave the methods by which Schleicher turned out Papen. Let von Schleicher succeed if he could; but if he failed, and turned to the President for support, he need expect no more loyalty or mercy than he had shown his own victims.

VIII

With the opening of the fourth and final period, from Schleicher's Chancellorship which began on 2 December 1932, to Hitler's which began on 30 January 1933, this tortuous story of political intrigue draws to its close. Yet the most surprising twists of all were reserved for the last chapter.

Schleicher had now to make good his claim that he could succeed where Papen had failed, and produce that national front, including the Nazis, which had been his consistent aim for two years. For all his love of intrigue and lack of scruple, Schleicher was an intelligent man. Without Papen's class prejudices he had a far clearer conception than any of the men around the President of the depth and seriousness of the crisis through which German society had been passing since the end of 1929. He had never fallen into the error of supposing that 'strong' government by itself was a remedy for the crisis, nor did he underestimate the force which lay behind such extremist movements as the Nazis and the Communists. His aim, stated again and again in these years, was to harness one of these movements, the Nazis, to the service of the State.

Schleicher's closest contact in the Nazi Party at this time was Gregor Strasser. If Hitler represented the will to power in the Party, and Röhm its preference for violence, Gregor Strasser represented its idealism – a brutalized idealism certainly, but a genuine desire to make a clean sweep. To Strasser National Socialism was a real political movement, not, as it was to Hitler, the instrument of his ambition. He took its programme seriously, as Hitler never had, and he was the leader of the Nazi Left-wing which, to the annoyance of Hitler's industrialist friends, still dreamed of a German Socialism and still won votes for the Party by its anti-capitalist radicalism. But Strasser, if he was much more to the Left than the other Party leaders, was also the head of the Party Organization, more in touch with feeling throughout the

local branches than anyone else, and more impressed than any of the other leaders by the set-backs of the autumn, culminating in the loss of two million votes at the November elections. Strasser was particularly impressed by the disillusionment of the more radical elements in the Party and their tendency to drift towards the Communists. He became convinced that the only course to save the Party from going to pieces was to make a compromise and get into power at once, even as part of a coalition. Hitler's attitude he regarded as illogical. The Nazi leader's insistence on legality offended and roused the suspicions of those who wanted a revolution, while his uncompromising demand for 'all or nothing' defeated his own policy when he was offered a share in power. Strasser was a convert to the tactics of legality, but saw the Party's chance to influence government policy and carry out at least a part of its programme being sacrificed to Hitler's ambition and his refusal to accept anything less than 'the whole power'.

This division of opinion in the Party leadership, and the strains to which it gave rise, had been present for some time. Goebbels, who was Strasser's sworn enemy, records Hitler's first open mention of the conflict on 31 August. Thereafter there are a dozen references to Strasser's 'intrigues' between the beginning of September and the beginning of December.

The day after Schleicher became Chancellor he sent for Gregor Strasser and made an offer to the Nazis. Having failed to get Hitler to discuss a deal, Schleicher suggested that Strasser himself should enter his Cabinet as Vice-Chancellor and Minister-President of the Prussian State Government. If he accepted, Strasser could take over Schleicher's plans for dealing with unemployment and help to establish cooperation with the trade unions. Schleicher's programme was a broad front extending from the reasonable Nazis to the reasonable Socialists, with an energetic programme to reduce unemployment. The offer to Strasser was a clever move on Schleicher's part. Not only was it attractive to Strasser as a way out of the Party's difficulties, but it would almost certainly split the Party leadership. In that case, if Hitler stood out Strasser might agree to come into the Cabinet on his own responsibility, and carry his following out of the Party. The same day, 3 December, elections in Thuringia showed nearly a forty per cent drop in the Nazi vote since July. This added force to Strasser's arguments for accepting Schleicher's offer in order at all costs to avoid further national elections.

On 5 December a conference of the Party leaders was held in

the Kaiserhof. Strasser found support from Frick, the leader of the Nazi group in the Reichstag, whose members were powerfully impressed by the Thuringian results and the threat that they might lose their seats and salaries in a new election. Göring and Goebbels, however, were hotly opposed, and carried Hitler with them. Hitler laid down terms for discussion with Schleicher, but placed the negotiations with the Chancellor in the hands of Göring and Frick – according to another version, of Göring and Röhm – deliberately excluding Strasser. On 7 December Hitler and Strasser had a further conversation in the Kaiserhof, in the course of which Hitler bitterly accused Strasser of bad faith, of trying to go behind his back and oust him from the leadership of the Party. Strasser angrily retorted that he had been entirely loyal, and had only thought of the interests of the Party. Going back to his room in the Hotel Excelsior, he sat down and wrote Hitler a long letter in which he resigned from his position in the Party. He reviewed the whole course of their relationship since 1925, attacked the irresponsibility and inconsistency of Hitler's tactics, and prophesied disaster if he persisted in them.

It is possible that if Strasser had stayed to fight out his quarrel with Hitler he could have carried a majority of the Party with him, although it would be unwise to underestimate Hitler's wiliness when in a corner. There is no doubt that Hitler was shaken by Strasser's revolt, as he had never been by any electoral defeat. The threat to his own authority in the Party touched him more closely than the loss of votes or the failure of negotiations had ever done. Goebbels wrote in his diary: 'In the evening the Leader comes to us. It is difficult to be cheerful. We are all rather downcast, in view of the danger of the whole Party falling to pieces and all our work being in vain. We are confronted with the great test. . . . Phone call from Ley. The situation in the Party is getting worse from hour to hour. The Leader must immediately return to the Kaiserhof. . . . Treachery, treachery, treachery! For hours the Leader paces up and down the room in the hotel. Suddenly he stops and says: "If the Party once falls to pieces, I shall shoot myself without more ado!"'[1]

But Strasser had always lacked the toughness to challenge Hitler outright, as his earlier capitulations had shown. When his brother, Otto, had defied Hitler and been cast off, Gregor Strasser had made his peace and remained. He had never planned a revolt such as Hitler suspected, and now, instead of rallying the latent

1. Goebbels: p. 206.

opposition to Hitler in the Party, he cursed the whole business and vanished without a word. While Frick searched anxiously for him in Berlin, he caught the train to Munich, and took his family off for a holiday in Italy.

Strasser's disappearance gave Hitler time to recover his confidence and quell any signs of mutiny. The Party's Political Organization department was broken up, Ley taking over part of its duties under Hitler's direct supervision, the rest being transferred to Goebbels and Darré. A declaration condemning Strasser in the sharpest terms was submitted to a full meeting of the Party leaders and Gauleiters in the Palace of the President of the Reichstag on 9 December. When Feder, who shared Strasser's Socialist ideals, refused to accept it, he was told to sign or get out. He signed. Hitler used all his skill to appeal to the loyalty of his old comrades and brought tears to their eyes. With a sob in his voice he declared that he would never have believed Strasser guilty of such treachery. Julius Streicher blubbered: 'Maddening that Strasser could do this to our leader.' At the end of this emotional *tour de force* 'the Gauleiters and Deputies,' Goebbels records, 'burst into a spontaneous ovation for the leader. All shake hands with him, promising to carry on until the very end and not to renounce the great Idea, come what may. Strasser now is completely isolated, a dead man. A small circle of us remain with the Leader, who is quite cheerful and elated again. The feeling that the whole Party is standing by him with a loyalty never hitherto displayed has raised his spirits and invigorated him.'[1] A few days later, on 15 December, a Central Party Commission was set up under Hess to supervise and coordinate the policy of the Party throughout Germany.

While Hitler worked to restore the threatened unity of his Party, Schleicher continued his talks with the other Party leaders, including representatives of the trade unions. The failure to bring in the Nazis at this stage did not unduly depress him. On 15 December he expounded his plans in a broadcast to the nation. He asked his listeners to forget that he was a soldier, and to think of him as 'the impartial trustee of the interests of all in an emergency'. He supported neither Capitalism nor Socialism, he declared: his aim was to provide work. A Reich Commissioner had been appointed to draw up plans for reducing unemployment; meanwhile there would be no new taxes or further wage

1. Goebbels: p. 209.

cuts. The system of agricultural quotas which Papen had introduced for the benefit of the big landowners would be ended; a huge programme of subsidized land settlement in the eastern provinces would be undertaken; and the Government would control prices, in the first place those of meat and coal. The Chancellor followed his speech by the restoration of recent wage and relief cuts, and the grant of greater freedom of the Press and of assembly.

In the event, Schleicher fell between two stools. He failed to overcome the distrust and hostility of the Social Democrats and the trade unions, or even of the Centre, which, remembering his part in the overthrow of Brüning, was not converted to his support by his advocacy of a policy not unlike Brüning's own. At the same time he stirred up the violent opposition of powerful interests in industry and agriculture. The industrialists disliked his conciliatory attitude towards labour; the farmers were furious at his reduction of agricultural protection; the East Elbian landowners denounced his plans for land settlement as 'agrarian Bolshevism' with the same uncompromising class spirit they had shown towards Brüning.

Schleicher made the great mistake of underestimating the forces opposed to him. In January 1933, Kurt von Schuschnigg, at that time Austrian Minister of Justice, paid a call on the Chancellor while visiting Berlin. 'General von Schleicher,' he wrote later, 'showed himself to be exceptionally optimistic with regard to the state of affairs in the Reich, of which he talked in very lively terms, particularly as regards its economic and political prospects. I remember clearly the words he used in this connexion: he was endeavouring, he said, to establish contacts throughout the trade-union organizations, and hoped in this way to build up a sound political platform, which would ensure a peaceful and prosperous development of the political situation. Herr Hitler was no longer a problem, his movement had ceased to be a political danger, and the whole problem had been solved, it was a thing of the past.'[1] Schuschnigg was so surprised by Schleicher's optimism, which no one else in Berlin shared, that he made a note of the conversation and its date: it was 15 January. A fortnight later Schleicher was to be sadly disillusioned.

The basis of the Chancellor's confidence was his belief that his enemies were unable to combine against him. So far as the Nazis

1. Kurt von Schuschnigg: *Dreimal Österreich*; English translation, *Farewell Austria* (London, 1938), pp. 165–6.

were concerned there were good grounds for believing them to be a declining force. The last three months before Hitler came to power – November and December 1932, January 1933 – marked the lowest point of Hitler's fortunes since he had broken into national politics in 1930. The most immediate problem was shortage of funds. The Nazi organization – an embryonic State within the framework of the old State, as Hitler claimed – was highly expensive to run. The Party was filled with thousands of officials who kept their places on the Party pay-roll often without clearly defined functions, often with duties that were either unnecessary or duplicated by someone else. The S.A., the hard core of which consisted of unemployed men who lived in S.A. messes and barracks, must have cost immense sums, however limited the amount spent on each man. Even at the rate of one mark a day, which is probably too low, that would mean an expenditure of the order of two million eight hundred thousand marks a week. Goebbels's own comments on party finances are despondent:

11 November – Receive a report on the financial situation of the Berlin organization. It is hopeless. Nothing but debts and obligations, together with the complete impossibility of obtaining any reasonable sum of money after this defeat.
10 December – The financial situation of Gau Berlin is hopeless. We must institute strict measures of economy, and make it self-supporting.
22 December – We must cut down the salaries of our Gauleiters, as otherwise we cannot manage to make shift with our finances.[1]

This was the time when S.A. men were sent into the streets to beg for money, rattling their boxes and asking passers-by to spare something 'for the wicked Nazis'. Konrad Heiden speaks of debts of twelve million marks, others of twenty million.

More serious was the sense of defeatism and demoralization in the Party. The very day after the loyal demonstration in Göring's palace, Goebbels noted: 'The feeling in the Party is still divided. All are waiting for something to happen.'[2] Every week-end after the Strasser crisis, Hitler, Göring, Ley, and Goebbels visited the different Gaue to talk to Party officials, and restore their confidence in the leadership. On 12 December, for instance, Goebbels reports that Hitler returned from a tour of Saxony where he spoke three times a day. The same evening he spoke again in Breslau. On the 18th, after speaking in Hagen and Münster, Goebbels joined Ley for a visit to the Ruhr. Together they addressed eight thousand local officials, Amtswalter, at Essen, and another ten

1. Goebbels: pp. 189, 209, 214. 2. ibid., p. 209.

thousand at Düsseldorf. Despite Goebbels's efforts at whistling in the dark to keep his spirits up, at the end of 1932, two and a half years after the first great election campaign, he wrote in his diary: 'This year has brought us eternal ill-luck. . . . The past was sad, and the future looks dark and gloomy; all chances and hopes have quite disappeared.'[1]

Suddenly, at the turn of the year, Hitler's luck changed, and a chance offered itself. The varied antagonisms which Schleicher had aroused found a common broker in the unexpected figure of Franz von Papen, and on 4 January Papen and Hitler met quietly in the house of the Cologne banker, Kurt von Schröder. The circumstances and purpose of this meeting have been much disputed: the account followed here is in the main that given by Schröder himself in a statement made at Nuremberg on 5 December 1945.[2] The meeting was arranged through Wilhelm Keppler, one of the Nazi 'contact-men' with the world of business and industry. The idea was broached to Schröder by Papen about 10 December 1932. About the same time Keppler got in touch with Schröder with a similar proposal from Hitler. The beginning of January was fixed upon, when Papen would be staying in the Saar, and Hitler would be going to conduct an election campaign in Lippe-Detmold. Considerable precautions were taken to keep the meeting secret. Hitler took a night train to Bonn, drove to Godesberg, changed cars, and, giving the rest of his party a rendezvous outside Cologne, disappeared in a closed car for an unknown destination.

Hitler took with him Hess, Himmler, and Keppler, but the talk with Papen, which lasted for two hours, was held in Schröder's study with only the banker present besides the two principals. First, misunderstandings had to be removed: the sentence on the Potempa murderers and Papen's behaviour on 13 August. Papen slipped out of the responsibility for Hitler's humiliation by putting all the blame on Schleicher for Hindenburg's refusal to consider Hitler as Chancellor. The change of attitude on the President's part, he said, had come as a great surprise to him. But what Papen had really come to talk about was the prospect of replacing Schleicher's Government: he suggested the establishment of a Nationalist and Nazi coalition in which he and Hitler would be joint Chancellors. 'Then Hitler made a long speech in

1. Goebbels: p. 215.
2. Text in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. II, pp. 922–4.

which he said, if he were made Chancellor, it would be necessary for him to be the head of the Government, but that supporters of Papen's could go into his Government as ministers, if they were willing to go along with him in his policy of changing many things. The changes he outlined at this time included elimination of the Social Democrats, Communists, and Jews from leading positions in Germany, and the restoration of order in public life. Papen and Hitler reached agreement in principle so that many of the points which had brought them in conflict could be eliminated and they could find a way to get together.' After lunch Schröder's guests stayed chatting together and left about 4 p.m.

Next day, to the embarrassment of both the participants, the meeting was headline news in the Berlin papers, and awkward explanations had to be given. Papen denied that the meeting was in any way directed against Schleicher, and, at his trial in Nuremberg,[1] he not only repudiated Schröder's account as entirely false, but claimed that his main purpose had been to persuade Hitler to enter the Schleicher Cabinet. There seems no reason to suppose, however, that Schröder gave an inaccurate report; perhaps Papen's memory played him a trick for once.

It is certainly wrong to suppose that the Hitler–Papen Government, which was to replace Schleicher, was agreed upon at Cologne; much hard bargaining lay ahead, and Schleicher's position had still to be more thoroughly undermined. But the first contact had been made; the two men had found common ground in their dislike of Schleicher and their desire to be revenged on him, each had sounded out the other's willingness for a deal. Hitler, moreover, received the valuable information that Schleicher had not been given the power to dissolve the Reichstag by the President, and – a point about which Schröder is modestly silent – arrangements were made to relieve the financial straits of the Nazi Party. Schröder was one of a group of industrialists and bankers who, in November 1932, sent a joint letter to Hindenburg urging him to give Hitler the powers to form a presidential cabinet.[2] Among those who had been active in collecting signatures was Dr Schacht,[3] and those who signed included many of the leaders of West German industry. At that

1. Nuremberg Proceedings, Part XVI, especially pp. 329–35.
2. N.D. 3901-PS.
3. cf. his letter to Hitler of 12 November 1932, N.D. EC-456, and also Dr Schacht's testimony at the Nuremberg trial, N.P., Part XIII, p. 29.

time Papen had intervened to cut off financial supplies from the Nazis, but now, with his blessing and Schröder's help, arrangements were made to pay the Nazis' debts. Hitler's break with Gregor Strasser, the acknowledged leader of the radical, anti-capitalist wing of the Party, may well have helped to make the agreement more easy. A few days later Goebbels noted: 'The financial situation has improved all of a sudden.'[1] The political hopes of the Nazis rose at the same time. On 5 January, commenting on the news of the meeting, Goebbels remarked: 'The present Government knows that this is the end for them. If we are successful, we cannot be far from power.'[2]

The Nazis could do little to help forward the intrigue against Schleicher; that had to be left to von Papen, who was still by chance living next door to the President in Berlin, and was a welcome and frequent visitor in his house.[3] It was important, however, to remove the impression of their declining strength. For this purpose Hitler decided to concentrate all the Party's resources on winning the elections in the tiny state of Lippe. The total vote at stake was only ninety thousand, but Hitler and Goebbels made their headquarters at Baron von Öynhausen's castle, Schloss Vinsebeck, and spent days haranguing meetings in the villages and small towns of the district. At Schwalenberg Hitler declared: 'Power comes at last in Germany only to him who has anchored this power most deeply in the people.'[4] On 15 January the Nazis were rewarded by an electoral victory in which they secured 39·6 per cent of the votes, a rise of 17 per cent. The Nazi Press brought out banner headlines, claiming that the Party was on the march again. 'Signal Lippe' was the title of Goebbels's own leader, and so loud was the noise made by the Nazi propaganda band that, even against their own better judgement, the group round the President were impressed.

The Nazis then proceeded to follow their success at Lippe by staging a mass demonstration in front of the Communist headquarters in Berlin, the Karl Liebknecht Haus. 'We shall stake everything on one throw to win back the streets of Berlin,' Goebbels wrote. The Government, after some hesitation, banned the Communists' counter-demonstration, and on 22 January, with a full escort of armed police, ten thousand S.A. men paraded

1. Goebbels: p. 228. 2. ibid., p. 221, cf. also p. 223.
3. Meissner's Affidavit. This too was denied by von Papen at Nuremberg.
4. Baynes: vol. I, p. 194.

on the Bülowplatz and listened to a ranting speech by Hitler. 'The Bülow Platz is ours,' Goebbels exulted. 'The Communists have suffered a great defeat. . . . This day is a proud and heroic victory for the S.A. and the Party.'[1]

By 20 January it was clear that Schleicher's attempt to construct a broad front representing all but the extremist parties had failed. The possibility of Gregor Strasser entering Schleicher's Cabinet was revived at the beginning of January, when Strasser returned to Berlin; and on 4 January, the day Hitler was meeting Papen in Cologne, Schleicher arranged for Strasser to talk to Hindenburg. As late as 14 January Goebbels was speculating anxiously on Strasser's entry into the Government. By the 16th, however, Goebbels writes that the papers are dropping Strasser and that he is finished; by the 19th Strasser was asking to see Hitler, and was refused.

One after another all the German Party leaders turned down Schleicher's approaches. The Nationalists had been alienated by the Chancellor's schemes for land colonization and by the threat to publish a secret Reichstag report on the scandals of the *Osthilfe*, the 'loans' which successive governments had made available to distressed landowners in the eastern provinces. They finally broke with Schleicher on 21 January and turned to the Nazis. Hitler had already seen Hugenberg, the Nationalist leader, on the 17th, and the final stage of negotiations for a Nazi–Nationalist Coalition opened on the evening of the 22nd in Ribbentrop's house at Dahlem.

Up to the very evening before the announcement of Hitler's Chancellorship, Papen continued to balance two possible plans. Either he could become Chancellor himself, with the support of Hugenberg and the Nationalists, in a presidential cabinet and dissolve the Reichstag for an indefinite period; or he could take the office of Vice-Chancellor in a Hitler Ministry, which would aim at a parliamentary majority with the help of the Nationalists and possibly of the Centre, dissolving the Reichstag if necessary in order to win a majority at fresh elections. In the second case, guarantees of various sorts would have to be obtained against the Nazis' abuse of power, they would have to be tied down by their partners in the coalition and the President's dislike of having Hitler as Chancellor would have to be overcome. Though he still insisted on the Chancellorship for himself, Hitler was now pre-

1. Goebbels: p. 231.

pared to enter a coalition and to search for a parliamentary majority, but there was room for a great deal of manoeuvring and bargaining on the composition of the Cabinet and the reservation of certain posts – the Foreign Minister and the Minister President of Prussia, the Ministers of Defence and Finance – for the President's own nominees.

On the Nazi side the principal negotiator was Göring, who was hastily summoned back from Dresden on 22 January for a meeting that evening, at which Papen, Meissner, and the President's son, Oskar von Hindenburg, met Hitler, Göring, and Frick.[1] One important gain Hitler made that night was to win over Oskar von Hindenburg, with whom he had a private conversation of an hour. It is believed that Hitler secured his support by a mixture of bribes and blackmail, possibly threatening to start proceedings to impeach the President and to disclose Oskar's part in the *Osthilfe* scandals and tax evasion on the presidential estate at Neudeck. It is not perhaps irrelevant to note that in August 1933 five thousand acres tax free were added to the Hindenburg estate, and that a year later Oskar was promoted from colonel to major-general. 'In the taxi on the way back,' Meissner recorded, 'Oskar von Hindenburg was extremely silent, and the only remark he made was that it could not be helped – the Nazis had to be taken into the Government.'[2]

The negotiations continued for another week. On the 23rd, the day after Hitler's meeting with Papen and Oskar von Hindenburg, Schleicher went to see the President. His hopes of splitting the Nazi Party had been frustrated; he admitted that he could not find a parliamentary majority and he asked for power to dissolve the Reichstag and govern by emergency decree. Hindenburg refused, using the same argument Schleicher himself had employed against Papen on 2 December: that such a course would lead to civil war. Ironically, Schleicher had reached the same position as Papen at the beginning of December, when he had forced Papen out because the latter wanted to fight Hitler, and had himself urged the need to form a government which would have the support of the National Socialists. The positions were exactly reversed, for it was now Papen who was able to offer the President

1. The meeting took place in the Dahlem home of a hitherto unknown Nazi, Ribbentrop, who was a friend of Papen's.

2. Meissner's Affidavit. For Oskar von Hindenburg's denials, cf. the record of his trial before the De-Nazification Court at Ülzen in March 1949: *Protokoll der mündlichen Verhandlung in dem Entnazifizierungsverfahren gegen den Generalleutnant a. D. Oskar von Hindenburg.*

the alternative which Schleicher had advocated in December, the formation of a government with a parliamentary majority in which the Nazi leader would himself take a responsible position. With the knowledge that this alternative was now being prepared behind Schleicher's back (Hitler and Papen had met again on the 24th), the President again refused his request on 28 January for power to dissolve the Reichstag, and left the Chancellor with no option but to resign. At noon the same day, Hindenburg officially entrusted Papen with the negotiations to provide a new government.

It was still uncertain whether it would be possible to bring Hitler and Hugenberg into the same coalition, and Papen had not yet put out of his mind the possibility of a presidential chancellorship with the support of Hugenberg and the Nationalists alone. Eager at any cost to prevent a Papen Chancellorship, and still convinced that the only practical course was to bring Hitler into the Government, Schleicher sent the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General von Hammerstein, to see Hitler at the Bechsteins' house in Charlottenburg on the afternoon of Sunday, 29 January, and to warn him that they might still both be left out in the cold by Papen. In that case Schleicher put forward the suggestion of a Hitler–Schleicher coalition to rule with the united support of the Army and the Nazis. Hitler, however, who was still hoping to hear that agreement had been reached for a full coalition between Papen, Hugenberg, and himself, returned a non-committal reply.

Much more alarming to Hitler was the possibility that the Army, under the leadership of Schleicher and Hammerstein, might intervene at the last moment to prevent the formation of the proposed coalition. On the evening of the 29th a rumour spread that Schleicher was preparing a putsch with the support of the Potsdam garrison. According to Hitler's own later account, he feared that Schleicher might carry off the President to East Prussia, and proclaim martial law.[1]

How much truth there may have been in this it is difficult to say.[2] If they ever seriously considered such a plan, Schleicher and Hammerstein took no steps to put it into effect. But Hitler could

1. Hitler's version of the final negotiations leading up to 30 January, given after dinner on 21 May 1942, is recorded in *Hitler's Table Talk* (London, 1953), pp. 495–9.

2. For the detailed story of the so-called Potsdam Putsch, see J. W. Wheeler Bennett: *The Nemesis of Power*, pp. 281–6.

not afford to take chances. On the night of 29 January he placed the Berlin S.A. under Helldorf in a state of alert and arranged with a Nazi police major, Wecke, to have six battalions of police ready to occupy the Wilhelmstrasse. Warning messages were sent to Papen and Hindenburg. Finally, arrangements were made for General von Blomberg, who had been recalled from Geneva to act as the new Minister of Defence, to be taken to the President the moment he reached Berlin the following morning.

The keys to the attitude of the Army were held by the President, the old Field-Marshal who was the embodiment of the military tradition, and thus in a position to suppress any possible attempt at a *coup*, and by General von Blomberg. Hindenburg had agreed to the formation of a Ministry in which Hitler was to be Chancellor and had nominated Blomberg to serve as Minister of Defence under Hitler. If Blomberg accepted the President's commission, Hitler could be virtually sure of the Army. It would be interesting to know how far Blomberg had been courted by the Nazis in advance. Both Blomberg and Colonel von Reichenau, his Chief of Staff while he was in command in East Prussia, had been in touch with Hitler,[1] and Blomberg, who had recently been serving as chief military adviser to the German delegation at the Disarmament Conference, had been hurriedly recalled without Schleicher's or Hammerstein's knowledge. Hammerstein's adjutant, Major von Kuntzen, was at the station when Blomberg arrived early on the morning of 30 January and ordered the general to report at once to the Commander-in-Chief. But beside von Kuntzen, another officer, Oskar von Hindenburg, adjutant to his father, was also present and ordered Blomberg to report at once to the President of the Republic. Fortunately for Hitler, it was the latter summons which the general obeyed. He accepted his new commission from the President, and the threat of a last-minute repudiation by the Army was thereby avoided. In September 1933, Hitler declared: 'On this day we would particularly remember the part played by our Army, for we all know well that if, in the days of our revolution, the Army had not stood on our side, then we should not be standing here today.'[2] For once he spoke no more than the truth.

1. A letter from Hitler to Colonel von Reichenau, dated 4 December 1932, and setting out his policy at length, is among the captured German documents. Blomberg and Reichenau were brought into contact with Hitler by Müller, the Protestant Chaplain to the Forces in East Prussia, who was an enthusiastic Nazi and later became Reich Bishop.

2. Hitler, on 23 September 1933. (Baynes: vol. I, p. 556).

It is possible that fear of what Schleicher might do helped Papen and Hugenberg to make up their minds and hastily compose their remaining differences with the Nazis. At any rate, on the morning of Monday the 30th, after a sleepless night during which he sat up with Göring and Goebbels to be ready for any eventuality, Hitler received the long-awaited summons to the President. The deal which Schleicher had made the object of his policy, and for which Strasser had worked, was accomplished at last, with Schleicher and Strasser left out.

During the morning a silent crowd filled the street between the Kaiserhof and the Chancellery. Already the members of the new coalition had begun to quarrel. While they were waiting in Meissner's office to go into the President, Hitler started to complain that he had not been appointed Commissioner for Prussia. If his powers were to be limited, he would insist on new Reichstag elections. This at once set Hugenberg off and a heated argument began which was only ended by Meissner insisting that the President would wait no longer and ushering them into his presence.[1]

In the meantime, at a window of the Kaiserhof, Röhm was keeping an anxious watch on the door from which Hitler must emerge. Shortly after noon a roar went up from the crowd: the Leader was coming. He ran down the steps to his car and in a couple of minutes was back in the Kaiserhof. As he entered the room his lieutenants crowded to greet him. The improbable had happened: Adolf Hitler, the petty official's son from Austria, the down-and-out of the Home for Men, the *Meldegänger* of the List Regiment, had become Chancellor of the German Reich.

1. Papen, *Memoirs*, pp. 243–4.