



Volume 6. Weimar Germany, 1918/19–1933

Professor of History Karl Alexander von Müller on the First NSDAP Rally in Munich in January 1923 (Retrospective Account)

The NSDAP planned to hold its first Reich Party Rally in Munich on January 27-29, 1923. The political mood in the lead-up to the rally was extremely heated, as French and Belgian troops had occupied the Ruhr region on January 11, and rumors of a coup were circulating in Munich. As a result, the Bavarian government declared a state of emergency in Munich and forbade the twelve mass rallies planned by the NSDAP. But thanks to the intervention of Ernst Röhm and the good will shown to Hitler by Lieutenant General Otto von Lossow, regional commander of the Bavarian Reichswehr contingent, and Gustav Ritter von Kahr, government president of Upper Bavaria, the ban was all but lifted. On January 27, the first NSDAP events took place in various Munich beer halls (among others, the Augustiner hall, the Bürgerbräu hall, and the Löwenbräu hall). Hitler made a brief appearance at each venue. On January 28, 5,000-6,000 SA storm troopers (i.e., brownshirts) and members of other so-called defensive organizations marched before Hitler on the Marsfeld, a large parade ground in central Munich. Afterwards, Hitler presented the first swastika standards to four SA activist units (Munich I and II, Landshut and Nuremberg) in attendance. After additional beer hall celebrations, the meeting of the general membership of the NSDAP was held on January 29 in the Krone circus hall. Already evident in 1923, the quasi-liturgical forms and rituals employed in NSDAP mass rallies were perfected in the coming years, particularly at the Reich Party Rallies (in Weimar in 1926, and in Nuremberg in 1927, 1929, and 1933-1938).

On the 28th, 6,000 SA men instead of 5,000 lined up on the Marsfeld. The previous evening Hitler had dashed in his car from one meeting to another. In the 'Löwenbräu' I heard him speak in public for the first time. How often I had attended public meetings in this hall! But neither during the war nor during the revolution had I been met on entering by so hot a breath of hypnotic mass excitement. It was not only the special tension of these weeks, of this day. 'Their own battle songs, their own flags, their own symbols, their own salute', I noted down, 'military-like stewards, a forest of bright red flags with black swastika on white ground, a strange mixture of the military and the revolutionary, of nationalist and socialist—in the audience also: mainly of the depressed middle class of every level—will it be welded together again here?' For hours, endless booming military music; for hours, short speeches by subordinate leaders. When was he coming? Had something unexpected happened? Nobody can describe the fever that spread in this atmosphere. Suddenly there was a movement at the back entrance. Words of command. The speaker on the platform stopped in mid-sentence. Everybody jumped up, saluting. And right through the shouting crowds and the streaming flags the one they were waiting for came with his followers, walking quickly to the platform, his right arm raised stiffly. He passed by me quite close and I saw. This was a different person from the one I had met now and then in private

houses; his gaunt, pale features contorted as if by inward rage, cold flames darting from his protruding eyes, which seemed to be searching out foes to be conquered. Did the crowd give him this mysterious power? Did it emanate from him to them? 'Fanatical, hysterical romanticism with a brutal core of willpower', I noted down. 'The declining middle class may be carrying this man, but he is not of them; he assuredly comes from totally different depths of darkness. Is he simply using them as a jumping-off point? [. . .]

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, Vol. 1, *The Rise to Power 1919-1934*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, p. 26.

Source of original German text: Karl Alexander von Müller, *Im Wandel einer Welt. Erinnerungen, Band Drei 1919-1932*. Edited by Otto Alexander von Müller. Munich, 1966, pp. 144-45; reprinted in Ernst Deuerlein, *Der Aufstieg der NSDAP in Augenzeugenberichten*. Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974, pp. 164-66.