



German History in Documents and Images

Volume 7. Nazi Germany, 1933-1945

Proclamation of the Reich Government to the German People (February 1, 1933)

Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor by Reich President Paul von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933. Germany was in the midst of the Great Depression with unemployment reaching almost 35%. Issued only two days after the *Machtübernahme* (seizure of power), this government proclamation outlines the perceived ills of German society and the Nazis' plans to remedy them. Motifs of loss, victimization, and anger are everywhere evident. For the Nazis, the German people were the victims of an unfair peace settlement in 1918; they were persecuted by the "November parties" (those who declared the Republic and created its constitution); and they were facing a supposedly existential crisis from Germany's communists. But in Hitler, Germany now had a confident, resolute leader, a chance to undo the crimes of the Left, and an opportunity to unite the German people across classes. This was a moment to restore "unity of mind and will" and a chance to return Germany to equal status among nations. These themes aided Hitler's rise to power and made proclamations like this one appealing, offering the sense that Germany was moving forward, away from the chaos and failures of Weimar.

Over fourteen years have passed since that unhappy day when the German people, blinded by promises made by those at home and abroad, forgot the highest values of our past, of the Reich, of its honor and its freedom, and thereby lost everything. Since those days of treason, the Almighty has withdrawn his blessing from our nation. Discord and hatred have moved in. Filled with the deepest distress, millions of the best German men and women from all walks of life see the unity of the nation disintegrating in a welter of egoistical political opinions, economic interests, and ideological conflicts.

As so often in our history, Germany, since the day the revolution broke out, presents a picture of heartbreaking disunity. We did not receive the equality and fraternity which was promised us; instead we lost our freedom. The breakdown of the unity of mind and will of our nation at home was followed by the collapse of its political position abroad.

We have a burning conviction that the German people in 1914 went into the great battle without any thought of personal guilt and weighed down only by the burden of having to defend the Reich from attack, to defend the freedom and material existence of the German people. In the appalling fate that has dogged us since November 1918 we see only the consequence of our inward collapse. But the rest of the world is no less shaken by great crises. The historical balance of power, which at one time contributed not a little to the understanding of the necessity for solidarity among the nations, with all the economic advantages resulting therefrom, has been destroyed.

The delusion that some are the conquerors and others the conquered destroys the trust between nations and thereby also destroys the world economy. But the misery of our people is terrible! The starving industrial proletariat have become unemployed in their millions, while the whole middle and artisan class have been made paupers. If the German farmer also is involved in this collapse we shall be faced with a catastrophe of vast proportions. For in that case, there will collapse not only a Reich, but also a 2000-year-old inheritance of the highest works of human culture and civilization.

All around us are symptoms portending this breakdown. With an unparalleled effort of will and of brute force the Communist method of madness is trying as a last resort to poison and undermine an inwardly shaken and uprooted nation. They seek to drive it towards an epoch which would correspond even less to the promises of the Communist speakers of today than did the epoch now drawing to a close to the promises of the same emissaries in November 1918.

Starting with the family, and including all notions of honor and loyalty, nation and fatherland, culture and economy, even the eternal foundations of our morals and our faith—nothing is spared by this negative, totally destructive ideology. Fourteen years of Marxism have undermined Germany. One year of Bolshevism would destroy Germany. The richest and most beautiful areas of world civilization would be transformed into chaos and a heap of ruins. Even the misery of the past decade and a half could not be compared with the affliction of a Europe in whose heart the red flag of destruction had been planted. The thousands of injured, the countless dead which this battle has already cost Germany may stand as a presage of the disaster.

In these hours of overwhelming concern for the existence and the future of the German nation, the venerable World War leader [Hindenburg] appealed to us men of the nationalist parties and associations to fight under him again as once we did at the front, but now loyally united for the salvation of the Reich at home. The revered President of the Reich having with such generosity joined hands with us in a common pledge, we nationalist leaders would vow before God, our conscience and our people that we shall doggedly and with determination fulfill the mission entrusted to us as the National Government.

It is an appalling inheritance which we are taking over.

The task before us is the most difficult which has faced German statesmen in living memory. But we all have unbounded confidence, for we believe in our nation and in its eternal values. Farmers, workers, and the middle class must unite to contribute the bricks wherewith to build the new Reich.

The National Government will therefore regard it as its first and supreme task to restore to the German people unity of mind and will. It will preserve and defend the foundations on which the strength of our nation rests. It will take under its firm protection Christianity as the basis of our morality, and the family as the nucleus of our nation and our state. Standing above estates and

classes, it will bring back to our people the consciousness of its racial and political unity and the obligations arising therefrom. It wishes to base the education of German youth on respect for our great past and pride in our old traditions. It will therefore declare merciless war on spiritual, political and cultural nihilism. Germany must not and will not sink into Communist anarchy.

In place of our turbulent instincts, it will make national discipline govern our life. In the process it will take into account all the institutions which are the true safeguards of the strength and power of our nation.

The National Government will carry out the great task of reorganizing our national economy with two big Four-Year Plans:

Saving the German farmer so that the nation's food supply and thus the life of the nation shall be secured.

Saving the German worker by a massive and comprehensive attack on unemployment.

In fourteen years the November parties have ruined the German farmer.

In fourteen years they created an army of millions of unemployed.

The National Government will carry out the following plan with iron resolution and dogged perseverance.

Within four years the German farmer must be saved from pauperism.

Within four years unemployment must be completely overcome.

Parallel with this, there emerge the prerequisites for the recovery of the economy.

The National Government will combine this gigantic project of restoring our economy with the task of putting the administration and the finances of the Reich, the states, and the communes on a sound basis.

Only by doing this can the idea of preserving the Reich as a federation acquire flesh and blood.

The idea of labor service and of settlement policy are among the main pillars of this program.

Our concern to provide daily bread will be equally a concern for the fulfillment of the responsibilities of society to those who are old and sick.

The best safeguard against any experiment which might endanger the currency lies in economical administration, the promotion of work, and the preservation of agriculture, as well as

in the use of individual initiative.

In foreign policy, the National Government will see its highest mission in the preservation of our people's right to an independent life and in the regaining thereby of their freedom. The determination of this Government to put an end to the chaotic conditions in Germany is a step towards the integration into the community of nations of a state having equal status and therefore equal rights with the rest. In so doing, the Government is aware of its great obligation to support, as the Government of a free and equal nation, that maintenance and consolidation of peace which the world needs today more than ever before.

May all others understand our position and so help to ensure that this sincere desire for the welfare of Europe and of the whole world shall find fulfillment.

Despite our love for our Army as the bearer of our arms and the symbol of our great past, we should be happy if the world, by restricting its armaments, made unnecessary any increase in our own weapons.

But if Germany is to experience this political and economic revival and conscientiously to fulfill its duties towards other nations, a decisive act is required: *We must overcome the demoralization of Germany by the Communists.*

We, men of this Government, feel responsible to German history for the reconstitution of a proper national body so that we may finally overcome the insanity of class and class warfare. We do not recognize classes, but only the German people, its millions of farmers, citizens and workers who together will either overcome this time of distress or succumb to it.

With resolution and fidelity to our oath, seeing the powerlessness of the present Reichstag to shoulder the task we advocate, we wish to commit it to the whole German people.

We therefore appeal now to the German people to sign this act of mutual reconciliation.

The Government of the National Uprising wishes to set to work, and it will work.

It has not for fourteen years brought ruin to the German nation; it wants to lead it to the summit.

It is determined to make amends in four years for the liabilities of fourteen years.

But it cannot subject the work of reconstruction to the will of those who were responsible for the breakdown.

The Marxist parties and their followers had fourteen years to prove their abilities.

The result is a heap of ruins.

Now, German people, give us four years and then judge us.

Let us begin, loyal to the command of the Field-Marshal. May Almighty God favor our work, shape our will in the right way, bless our vision and bless us with the trust of our people. We have no desire to fight for ourselves; only for Germany.

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, pp. 131-34.

Source of original German text: *Völkischer Beobachter*, February 2, 1933.