

HITLER'S RISE TO POWER

The story as told by Douglas Reid in his book *Insanity Fair* (Jonathan Cape, 10s. 6d.), printed by permission.

In 1925, when Hindenburg was first elected President, his electoral promises had included one of land in East Prussia to ex-servicemen smallholders, and money to help them settle there. The Field-Marshal had not forgotten the men he had led back from the war! The great landowners grumbled together about "agrarian bolshevism," for the land could only be found by splitting up bankrupt big estates—and they bought Neudeck for Hindenburg. And Hindenburg five years later, as a condition of signing the Young Plan, extorted a written promise from the Socialist Chancellor Hermann Müller that £12,000,000 from the savings falling to Germany under this lesser reparations burden should go to the great landowners, his fellow squires, to order their affairs.

Hindenburg, installed at Neudeck, felt the call of the land. You will begin to discern the real reasons why things happen in politics, why moderate regimes are overthrown and dictatorships set up.

Now, in 1932, Brüning, in his efforts to hold the fort, had proposed the confiscation, against compensation, of bankrupt estates in East Prussia and their division among smallholders. The Field-Marshal's own promise to his men was to be redeemed. A Reichstag Committee had inquired into the use of the millions granted in 1927 and 1928 to those great landowners for whom Hindenburg in 1930 had demanded another £12,000,000, and had uncovered appalling scandals. One landowner, said the investigators, had whored, drunk and gambled away the public money advanced to him.

The landowners knew of these things and clustered round the President, murmuring "agrarian bolshevism" in his ear. Brüning, they said, was the instrument of the internationalists, a man of Geneva, the enemy of property, the chosen spokesman of all those Marxists and republicans and Jews and Papists at home who had stabbed Germany in the back in 1918, the trusted friend of those foreign foes who kept Germany in chains, the enemy of everything Protestant and Prussian and true blue German.

That was why Brüning that morning, just before the sailors came marching down the street, was curtly dismissed by Hindenburg. He had expected it, for the day before Hindenburg had received him with a sheaf of notes in his hand, on which were written in block capitals legible to his failing eyes the things the schemers had told him to say to Brüning—"Bolshevik Ministers in your Government," "Bolshevik Policy," and the like more.

On this day Hindenburg had scarcely bothered to look at the man who six weeks earlier had rallied nineteen million German voters to his cause, but had turned his back on him and gone out to inspect the guard, muttering: "Now I can have a Cabinet of my friends."

The fate of Germany had once more been decided, in favour of an absolute military despotism, by the great landowners of Germany east of the Elbe, the class which had always ruled Germany and led her from war to war, which had gathered in pious loyalty about the Hohenzollern kings and emperors:

Unser König absolut
Wenn er unseren Willen tut.
Our unchallenged King and Lord
So long as he obey our word.

.....

Schleicher . . . apparently hoped to win over a large body of moderate and middle-class opinion by adopting the project that had chiefly been used by the intriguers to bring about Brüning's downfall—the project for the confiscation, against compensation, of the subsidised but still bankrupt East Prussian estates and their division among ex-service smallholders.

The great landowners had not overthrown Brüning to be pestered by Schleicher. They rose as one man and swarmed about Hindenburg, their co-opted fellow landowner, like angry bees, buzzing "Bolshevism" into his ear.

Schleicher then played his trump card, as he thought. He threatened to publish the report of the parliamentary committee that had investigated the use and abuse of the millions advanced to great East Prussian landowners to order their affairs, that report which until now had rested securely in a Reichstag pigeonhole and which disclosed how bankrupt East Prussian noblemen had spent the grants given to put their estates in order on new motor cars and trips to the Riviera. . . .

The scandal revealed by it sprawled over the whole large estate area of East Prussia. The Hindenburgs, too, had their estate there, and had not forgotten their own little transaction, by which the payment of death duties had been thoughtfully fore-thwarted, the deeds for the estate presented to the President by grateful and far-sighted East Prussian landlords having been made out in the name of the aged President's son.

The Prussian Army, the sturdy oak from which the German Reich had ultimately sprung, has its deepest roots in the landed estates of East Prussia. Here the tradition of blood and iron was born that made out of a tiny Margraviate one of the most powerful Empires the modern world has known. And now a Prussian General, using stupid words like "insolvency" and "bankruptcy" and "squandering public money" and "settlements for ex-soldiers" proposed to dispossess landowners indebted to the public purse. The landlords in their thousands beleaguered Hindenburg's palace and his manor at Neudeck, through their emissary Oldenburg-Januschau and others.

Schleicher allowed the newspapers to publish a little of the report. After his downfall it vanished into a Hitlerist pigeonhole, never to be heard of again. The great landowners remained comfortably sitting on their estates and loudly applauded the vociferous campaign against Socialist, Marxist and Jewish corruption with which the Nazis ushered in their rule over Germany.

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