

March 23, 1933

Thus the Reichstag and the Reich President were, for all practical purposes, eliminated for four years. But not only that: the laws passed by the Reich Government were allowed to deviate from the Constitution "to the extent that they do not concern the institutions of the Reichstag or Reichsrat as such. The rights of the Reich President shall remain inviolate" (Article 2).

Hitler had made a fine distinction between the Reichstag and the Reichsrat on the one hand and the Reich President on the other. The institutions of the Reichstag and the Reichsrat were to be preserved (although now that the National Socialist Länder Governments had been established, the Reichsrat no longer exercised any restraining function). However, there were no guarantees provided to secure the office of Reich President anchored in the Constitution, the election procedure, or the question of representation in case of incapacity or death—merely the rights were to remain inviolate.

This fine distinction was to have grave consequences, particularly in light of the certainly imminent death of the 85-year-old Reich President. Hitler was authorized to simply assume the powers of the Reich President which thus did, in fact, remain "inviolate."

Clad in a uniform and brown shirt, Hitler submitted the following policy statement on the Enabling Act to the Reichstag on March 23:¹⁴⁵

Ladies and Gentlemen of the German Reichstag!

By agreement with the Reich Government, today the National Socialist German Workers' Party and the German National People's Party have presented to you for resolution a notice of motion concerning a "Law for Removing the Distress of Volk and Reich." The reasons for this extraordinary measure are as follows:

In November 1918, the Marxist organizations seized the executive power by means of a Revolution. The monarchs were dethroned, the authorities of Reich and Länder removed from office, and thus a breach of the Constitution was committed. The success of the revolution in a material sense protected these criminals from the grips of justice. They sought moral justification by asserting that Germany or its government bore the guilt for the outbreak of the War.

This assertion was deliberately and objectively untrue. In consequence, however, these false accusations in the interest of our former enemies led to the severest oppression of the entire German Volk, and the violation of the assurances given to us in Wilson's Fourteen Points then led to a time of boundless misfortune for Germany, that is to say the working German Volk.

All the promises made by the men of November 1918 proved to be, if not acts of intentional deception, then no less damnable illusions. The "achievements of the Revolution" were, taken in their entirety, agreeable for only the

March 23, 1933

smallest of fractions of our Volk, but for the overwhelming majority, at least insofar as these people were forced to earn their daily bread by honest work, they were infinitely sad. It is understandable that the survival instinct of those parties and men guilty of this development invents a thousand euphemisms and excuses. An objective comparison of the average outcome of the last fourteen years with the promises once proclaimed is a crushing indictment of the responsible architects of this crime unparalleled in German history.

In the course of the past fourteen years, our Volk has suffered deterioration in all sectors of life, which could inconceivably have been greater. The question as to what, if anything, could have been worse than in these times is a question which cannot be answered in light of the basic values of our German Volk as well as the political and economic inheritance which once existed.

In spite of its lack of mobility in political feelings and positions, the German Volk itself has increasingly turned away from concepts, parties, and associations which, in its eyes, are responsible for these conditions.

The number of Germans who inwardly supported the Weimar Constitution in spite of the suggestive significance and ruthless exploitation of the executive power dwindled, in the end, to a mere fraction of the entire nation.

Another typical characteristic of these fourteen years was the fact that—apart from natural fluctuations—the curve of developments has shown a constant decline. This depressing realization was one of the causes of the general state of despair. It served to promote the insight into the necessity of thoroughly rejecting the ideas, organizations, and men in which one gradually and rightly began to recognize the underlying causes of our decay.

The National Socialist Movement was thus able, in spite of the most horrible oppression, to convert increasing numbers of Germans in terms of spirit and will to defensive action. Now, in association with the other national leagues, it has eliminated the powers which have been ruling since November 1918 within a few short weeks and, by means of a revolution, transferred public authority to the hands of the National Government. On March 5, the German Volk gave its approval to this action.

The program for the reconstruction of the Volk and the Reich is determined by the magnitude of the distress crippling our political, moral and economic life. Filled with the conviction that the causes of this collapse lie in internal damage to the body of our Volk, the Government of the National Revolution aims to eliminate the afflictions from our *völkisch* life which would, in future, continue to foil any real recovery. The disintegration of the nation into irreconcilably opposite Weltanschauungen which was systematically brought about by the false doctrines of Marxism means the destruction of the basis for any possible community life.

The dissolution permeates all of the basic principles of social order. The completely opposite approaches of the individuals to the concepts of state, society, religion, morality, family, and economy rips open differences which will lead to a war of all against all. Starting with the liberalism of the past century, this development will end, as the laws of nature dictate, in Communist chaos.

The mobilization of the most primitive instincts leads to a link between the concepts of a political theory and the actions of real criminals. Beginning with

March 23, 1933

pillaging, arson, raids on the railway, assassination attempts, and so on—all these things are morally sanctioned by Communist theory. Alone the method of individuals terrorizing the masses has cost the National Socialist Movement more than 350 dead and tens of thousands of injured within the course of a few years.

The burning of the Reichstag, one unsuccessful attempt within a large-scale operation, is only a taste of what Europe would have to expect from a triumph of this demonic doctrine. When a certain press, particularly outside Germany, today attempts, true to the political lie advanced to a principle by Communism, to link Germany's national uprising to this disgraceful act, this can only serve to strengthen my resolve to leave no stone unturned in order to avenge this crime as quickly as possible by having the guilty arsonist and his accomplices publicly executed!

Neither the German Volk nor the rest of the world has become sufficiently conscious of the entire scope of the operation planned by this organization. Only by means of its immediate action was the Government able to ward off a development which would have shaken all of Europe had it proceeded to its disastrous end. Several of those who fraternize with the interests of Communism both within and outside of Germany, motivated by hatred for the national uprising, would themselves have become victims of such a development.

It will be the utmost goal of the National Government to stamp out and eliminate every trace of this phenomenon, not only in the interest of Germany, but in the interest of the rest of Europe.

It will not lose sight of the realization that, in doing so, it is not the negative problem of this organization with which it is dealing, but rather the implementation of the positive task of winning the German worker for the National State. Only the creation of a real Volksgemeinschaft, rising above the interests and conflicts of *Stände und Klassen*, is capable of permanently removing the source of nourishment of these aberrations of the human mind. The establishment of such a solidarity in Weltanschauung in the body of the German politic is all the more important, for only this will make it possible to maintain friendly relations with the non-German powers without regard to the tendencies or Weltanschauungen to which they are subject, for the elimination of Communism in Germany is a purely domestic German affair. It should be in the interests of the rest of the world as well, for the outbreak of Communist chaos in the densely populated German Reich would lead to political and economic consequences particularly in the rest of western Europe, the proportions of which are unfathomable. The inner disintegration of our Volksgemeinschaft inevitably resulted in an increasingly alarming weakening of the authority of the highest levels of leadership. The sinking reputation of the Reich Government—which is the inevitable product of unstable domestic conditions of this type—led to ideas on the part of various parties in the individual Länder which are incompatible with the unity of the Reich. The greatest consideration for the traditions of the Länder cannot erase the bitter realization that the extent of the fragmentation of national life in the past was not only not beneficial, but positively injurious to the world and life status of our Volk.

March 23, 1933

It is not the task of a superior national leadership to subsequently surrender what has grown organically to the theoretical principle of an unrestrained unitarianization. But it is its duty to raise the unity of spirit and will of the leadership of the nation and thus the concept of the Reich as such beyond all shadow of a doubt.

The welfare of our communities and Länder—as well as the existence of each German individual—must be protected by the State. Therefore the Reich Government does not intend to dissolve the Länder by means of the Enabling Act. However, it will institute measures which will guarantee the continuity of political intention in the Reich and Länder from now on and for all time. The greater the consensus of spirit and will, the lesser the interest of the Reich for all time in violating the independent cultural and economic existence of the separate Länder. The present habit of the Governments of the Länder and the Reich of mutually belittling each other, making use of the modern means of public propaganda, is completely outrageous. I will under no circumstances tolerate—and the Reich Government will resolve all measures to combat—the spectacle of ministers of German Governments attacking or belittling each other before the world in mass meetings or even with the aid of public radio broadcasts.

It also results in a complete invalidation of the legislative bodies in the eyes of the Volk when, even assuming normal times, the Volk is driven to the polls in the Reich or in the individual Länder almost twenty times in the course of four years. The Reich Government will find the way to ensure that the expression of the will of the nation, once given, leads to uniform consequences for both the Reich and the Länder.

A further reform of the Reich will only ensue from ongoing developments. Its aim must be to design a constitution which ties the will of the Volk to the authority of a genuine leadership. The statutory legalization of this reform of the Constitution will be granted to the Volk itself.

The Government of the National Revolution basically regards it as its duty, in accordance with the spirit of the Volk's vote of confidence, to prevent the elements which consciously and intentionally negate the life of the nation from exercising influence on its formation. The theoretical concept of equality before the law shall not be used, under the guise of equality, to tolerate those who despise the laws as a matter of principle or, moreover, to surrender the freedom of the nation to them on the basis of democratic doctrines. The Government will, however, grant equality before the law to all those who, in forming the front of our Volk against this danger, support national interests and do not deny the Government their assistance.

Our next task, in any case, is to call upon the spiritual leaders of these destructive tendencies to answer for themselves and at the same time to rescue the victims of their seduction.

In particular, we perceive in the millions of German workers who pay homage to these ideas of madness and self destruction only the results of an unforgivable weakness on the part of former governments who failed to put a stop to the dissemination of these ideas, the practical implementation of which they were forced to punish. The Government will not allow itself to be shaken by

March 23, 1933

anyone in its decision to solve this problem. Now it is the responsibility of the Reichstag to adopt a clear standpoint for its part. This will change nothing as to the fate of Communism and the other organizations fraternizing with it. In its measures, the National Government is guided by no other factor than preserving the German Volk, and in particular the mass of millions making up its working populace, from unutterable misery.

Thus it views the matter of restoring the monarchy as out of the question at present in light of the very existence of these circumstances. It would be forced to regard any attempt to solve this problem on the part of the individual Länder as an attack on the legal entity of the Reich and take respective action.

Simultaneously with this political purification of our public life, the Reich Government intends to undertake a thorough moral purging of the German *Volkskörper*. The entire system of education, the theater, the cinema, literature, the press, and radio—they all will be used as a means to this end and valued accordingly. They must all work to preserve the eternal values residing in the essential character of our Volk. Art will always remain the expression and mirror of the yearning and the reality of an era. The cosmopolitan contemplative attitude is rapidly disappearing. Heroism is arising passionately as the future shaper and leader of political destinies. The task of art is to give expression to this determining spirit of the age. *Blut and Rasse* will once more become the source of artistic intuition. The task of the government, particularly in an age of limited political power, is to ensure that the internal value of life and the will of the nation to live are given that much more monumental artistic expression in culture. This resolve entails the obligation to grateful appreciation of our great past. The gap between this past and the future must be bridged in all sectors of our historical and cultural life. Reverence for the Great Men must be instilled once more in German youth as a sacred inheritance. In being determined to undertake the political and moral purification of our public life, the government is creating and securing the requirements for a genuinely profound return to religious life.

The advantages in personnel policy which might result from compromises with atheist organizations do not come close to offsetting the results which would become apparent in the general destruction of basic moral values.

The National Government perceives in the two Christian confessions the most important factors for the preservation of our *Volkestum*. It will respect any contracts concluded between these Churches and the Länder.

Their rights are not to be infringed upon. But the Government expects and hopes that the task of working on the national and moral regeneration of our Volk taken on by the Government will, in turn, be treated with the same respect.

It will face all of the other confessions with objective fairness. However, it cannot tolerate that membership in a certain confession or a certain race could mean being released from general statutory obligations or even constitute a license for committing or tolerating crimes which go unpunished. The Government's concern lies in an honest coexistence between Church and State; the fight against a materialist *Weltanschauung* and for a genuine *Volksgemeinschaft* equally serves both the interests of the German nation and the welfare of our Christian faith.

March 23, 1933

Our legal institutions must above all work to preserve this Volksgemeinschaft. The irremovability of the judges on the one hand must ensure a flexibility in their judgments for the welfare of society on the other. Not the individual but the Volk as a whole must be the focal point of legislative efforts. In future, high treason and betrayal of the Volk (*Landes- und Volksverrat*) will be ruthlessly eradicated. The foundations on which the judiciary is based can be none other than the foundations on which the nation is based. Thus may the judiciary always take into consideration the difficult burden of decision carried by those who bear the responsibility for shaping the life of the nation under the harsh dictates of reality.

Great are the tasks of the National Government in the sphere of economic life.

Here all action shall be governed by one law: the Volk does not live for the economy, and the economy does not exist for capital, but capital serves the economy and the economy serves the Volk!

In principle, the Government protects the economic interests of the German Volk not by taking the roundabout way through an economic bureaucracy to be organized by the State, but by the utmost promotion of private initiative and a recognition of the rights of property.

A fair balance must be established between productive intention on the one hand and productive work on the other. The administration should respect the results of ability, industriousness and work by being thrifty. The problem of our public finances is also a problem which is, in no small part, the problem of a thrifty administration.

The proposed reform of our tax system must result in a simplification in assessment and thus to a decrease in costs and charges. In principle, the tax mill should be built downstream and not at the source. As a consequence of these measures, the simplification of the administration will certainly result in a decrease in the tax burden. This reform of the tax system which is to be implemented in the Reich and the Länder is not, however, an overnight matter, but one to be contemplated when the time is judged to be right.

As a matter of principle, the Government will avoid currency experiments.

We are faced above all with two economic tasks of the first order. The salvation of the German peasant must be achieved at all costs.

The annihilation of this class in our Volk would bring with it the most severe consequences imaginable. The restoration of the profitability of the agricultural operations may be hard on the consumer. But the fate which would descend upon the entire German Volk should the German peasant perish would stand no comparison with these hardships. Only in connection with the profitability of our agriculture which must be achieved at all costs can the problems of stays of execution or debt relief be solved. Were this to prove unsuccessful, the annihilation of our peasants would inevitably lead not only to the collapse of the German economy per se, but above all to the collapse of the German *Volkskörper*. The maintenance of its health is, however, the first requirement for the blossoming and flourishing of our industry, German domestic trade, and the German export industry. Without the counterweight of the German peasantry, Communist madness would already have overrun Germany by now and thus

March 23, 1933

conclusively destroyed the German economy. What the entire economy, including our export industry, owes to the healthy common sense of the German peasant cannot be compensated by any kind of sacrifice in terms of business. Thus our greatest attention must be devoted to the further settlement of German land in future.

Furthermore, it is perfectly clear to the National Government that the removal of the distress in both agricultural and urban economy is contingent upon the integration of the army of unemployed in the process of production.

This constitutes the second and most monumental economic task. It can be solved only by a general pacification in implementing sound natural economic principles and all measures necessary, even if, at the time, they cannot expect to enjoy any degree of popularity. The creation of jobs and compulsory labor service are, in this connection, only isolated measures within the scope of the offensive as a whole.

The attitude of the National Government toward the *Mittelstand* is similar to its attitude toward the German peasants.

Its salvation can only be effected within the scope of general economic policy. The National Government is determined to find a far-reaching solution to this problem. It recognizes its historical task of supporting and promoting the millions of German workers in their struggle for their rights to exist. As Chancellor and National Socialist, I feel allied to them as the former companions of my youth. The increase in the consumer power of these masses will constitute a substantial means of reviving the economy. While maintaining our social legislation, the first step to its reform must be taken. In principle, however, every worker shall be utilized in the service of the public. The stagnation of millions of human working hours is madness and a crime which must inevitably lead to the impoverishment of all. Regardless of which values would have been created by the utilization of our surplus work force, for millions of people who today are going to waste in misery and distress, they could represent essential values of life. The organizational capabilities of our Volk must and will succeed in solving this problem.

We know that the geographic position of Germany, with her lack of raw materials, does not fully permit *Autarkie* for our Reich. It cannot be stressed too often that nothing is further from the Reich Government's mind than hostility to exporting. We know that we need this connection with the world and that the sale of German goods in the world represents the livelihood of many millions of German Volksgenossen.

But we also know the requirements for a sound exchange of services between the peoples of the earth. For years, Germany has been compelled to perform services without receiving counter-services. Consequently, the task of maintaining Germany as an active partner in the exchange of goods is less a question of commercial than of financial policy. As long as we are not accorded any settlement of our foreign debts which is fair and appropriate to our strength, we shall unfortunately be forced to maintain our foreign exchange control policy (*Devisenzwangswirtschaft*). For this reason, the Reich Government is also obligated to maintain the dam built against the flow of capital across the borders. If the Reich Government allows itself to be guided by these principles,

March 23, 1933

one can surely expect the growing understanding of the foreign countries to ease the integration of our Reich in the peaceful competition of the nations.

The first step toward promoting transportation with the aim of achieving a reasonable balance of all transportation interests—a reform of the motor vehicle tax—will take place at the beginning of next month. The maintenance of the Reichsbahn and its reintegration under Reich authority, which is to be effected as quickly as possible, is a task which commits us not only in an economic, but also in a moral sense. The National Government will give every encouragement to the development of aviation as a means of peacefully connecting the peoples to one another.

For all this activity, the Government requires the support not only of the general powers in our Volk, which it is determined to utilize to the furthest possible extent, but also the devoted loyalty and work of its professional civil service. Only if the public finances are in urgent need will interferences take place; however, even in such a case, strict fairness shall have the highest priority in governing our actions.

The protection of the frontiers of the Reich, and with them the life of our Volk and the existence of our economy, is now in the hands of our Reichswehr which, in accordance with the terms imposed upon us by the Treaty of Versailles, can be regarded as the only really disarmed force in the world. In spite of its small size prescribed therein and its totally insufficient arms, the German Volk can regard its Reichswehr with proud satisfaction. This slight instrument of our national self-defense came into existence under the most difficult conditions. In its spirit, it is the bearer of our best military traditions. With painstaking conscientiousness the German Volk has thus fulfilled the obligations imposed upon it in the Peace Treaty; what is more, even the replacement of ships in our fleet to which we were authorized at that time has—I may be allowed to say, unfortunately—been carried out only to a small extent.

For years Germany has been waiting in vain for the redemption of the promise to disarm given us by the others. It is the sincere desire of the National Government to be able to refrain from increasing the German Army and our weapons insofar as the rest of the world is also finally willing to fulfill its obligation of radically disarming. For Germany wants nothing except equal rights to live and equal freedom.

However, the National Government wishes to cultivate this spirit of a will for freedom in the German Volk. The honor of the nation, the honor of our Army, and the ideal of freedom—all must once more become sacred to the German Volk!

The German Volk wishes to live in peace with the world.

It is for this very reason that the Reich Government will use every means to definitively eliminate the separation of the peoples on earth into two categories. Keeping open this wound leads the one to distrust, the other to hatred, and in the end to a general feeling of insecurity. The National Government is willing to extend a hand in sincere understanding to every people which is determined to once and for all put an absolute end to the tragic past. The distress of the world can only come to an end if the appropriate foundation is created by means of stable political conditions and if the peoples regain confidence in one another.

March 23, 1933

To deal with the economic catastrophe, the following is necessary:

1. an absolutely authoritarian leadership at home to create confidence in the stability of conditions;
2. safeguarding peace on the part of the major nations for a long time to come and thus restoring the confidence of the people in one another; and
3. the final triumph of the principles of common sense in the organization and leadership of the economy as well as a general release from reparations and impossible liabilities for debts and interest.

We are unfortunately confronted by the fact that the Geneva Conference, in spite of lengthy negotiations, has not yet reached any practical result. The decision to institute a real disarmament measure has repeatedly been delayed by questions on technical detail and by the introduction of problems which have nothing to do with disarmament. This procedure is unsuitable.

The illegal state of unilateral disarmament and the resulting national insecurity of Germany cannot last any longer.

We recognize it as a sign of responsibility and good will that the British Government has, with its disarmament proposal, attempted to finally move the Conference to arrive at speedy decisions. The Reich Government will support any efforts aimed at effectively implementing general disarmament and securing Germany's long-overdue claim for disarmament. We have been disarmed for fourteen years, and for the past fourteen months we have been waiting for the outcome of the Disarmament Conference. Even more far-reaching is the plan of the head of the Italian Government, who is making a generous and foresighted attempt to ensure the smooth and consistent development of European politics as a whole. We attach the most earnest significance to this plan; we are willing to cooperate with absolute sincerity on the basis it provides in order to unite the four great powers, England, France, Italy, and Germany, in peaceful cooperation to courageously and determinedly approach those tasks upon the solution of which Europe's fate depends.

For this reason we feel particularly grateful for the appreciative warmth which has greeted Germany's national uprising in Italy. We wish and hope that the concurrence of spiritual ideals will be the basis for a continuing consolidation of the friendly relations between the two countries.

Similarly, the Reich Government, which regards Christianity as the unshakable foundation of the ethics and morality of the Volk, places great value on friendly relations with the Vatican and attempts to develop them. We are filled with a feeling of empathy for the troubles and distress of our *Brudervolk* in Austria. In all its doings, the Reich Government is conscious of the connection between the fate of all German tribes. The attitude toward the other individual foreign powers is evident from what has already been said. But there as well, where the mutual relations are already encumbered with difficulties, we shall endeavor to reach a settlement. However, the differentiation between victor and vanquished can never be the basis of an understanding.

We are nonetheless of the conviction that a settlement of this sort in our relations to France is possible if both governments really attack the problems confronting them with farsightedness. In regard to the Soviet Union, the Reich Government is determined to cultivate friendly relations which are productive

March 23, 1933

for both parties. The Government of the National Revolution above all views itself capable of such a positive policy with regard to Soviet Russia. The fight against Communism in Germany is an internal affair, in which we will never tolerate outside interference. The national political relations to other powers to which we are related by mutual interests will not be affected by this. Our relationship with the other countries shall continue to warrant our most earnest attention in future, in particular our relationship to the major countries overseas, with which Germany has long been allied by friendly ties and economic interests.

We have particularly at heart the fate of the Germans living outside the borders of the Reich who are allied to us by language, culture, and traditions and who fight hard to retain these values. The National Government is resolved to use all the means at its command to support the rights internationally guaranteed to the German minorities.

We welcome the plan of the World Economic Conference and approve of its meeting soon. The Reich Government is willing to contribute to this Conference in order to finally achieve positive results.

The most important question is the problem of our short-term and long-term indebtedness abroad.

The complete change in the conditions of the commodity markets of the world requires an adaptation. Only by means of trusting cooperation is it possible to really remove the widespread problems. Ten years of honest peace will be more beneficial for the welfare of all nations than thirty years of drawn-out stagnation in the terms of victor and vanquished.

In order to place itself in a position to fulfill the tasks falling within this scope, the Government has had the two major parties, the National Socialists and the German Nationalists, introduce the Enabling Act in the Reichstag. Some of the planned measures require the approval of the majority necessary for constitutional amendments. The performance of these tasks and their completion is necessary. It would be inconsistent with the aim of the national uprising and it would fail to suffice for the intended goal were the Government to negotiate with and request the approval of the Reichstag for its measures in each given case. In this context, the Government is not motivated by a desire to give up the Reichstag as such. On the contrary: it reserves the right, for the future as well, to inform the Reichstag of its measures or to obtain its consent.

The authority and the fulfillment of the tasks would suffer, however, were doubts in the stability of the new regime to arise in the Volk. The Reich Government views a further session of the Reichstag as an impossibility under the present condition of a far-reaching state of excitation in the nation. Rarely has the course of a revolution of such great magnitude run in such a disciplined and unbloody manner as the *Erhebung* of the German Volk during these past weeks. It is my will and my firm intention to provide for this smooth development in future as well.

However, this makes it all the more necessary that the National Government be accorded that position of sovereignty which is fitting, in such an age, to put a halt to developments of a different sort. The Government will only make use of this authorization insofar as this is requisite for the implementation of

March 23, 1933

vital measures. The existence of neither the Reichstag nor the Reichsrat is endangered. The position and the rights of the Reich President remain inviolate. It will always be the first and foremost task of the Government to bring about inner consensus with his aims. The existence of the Länder will not be abolished. The rights of the Churches will not be curtailed and their position vis-à-vis the State will not be altered. The number of cases in which there is an internal necessity for taking refuge in such a law is, in and of itself, limited. All the more, however, the Government insists upon the passage of the bill. Either way, it is asking for a clear decision. It is offering the parties of the Reichstag the chance for a smooth development which might lead to the growth of an understanding in future. However, the Government is just as determined as it is prepared to accept a notice of rejection and thus a declaration of resistance. May you, Gentlemen, now choose for yourselves between peace or war!

The gentlemen chose peace, or so they were led to believe.

The deputies of all the parties had only domestic policy in mind while they listened to Hitler's remarks on his government. The National Socialists were already accustomed to complying with Hitler's every wish. The German Nationalists and the other right-wing parties were pleased that the Socialists, i.e. the "Marxists," would be prevented from taking any part in government. The Center was happy that the indispensable role it had played in bringing about an absolute majority in every government since 1918 had at least prevailed in regard to achieving the two-thirds majority. The democratic German State Party wanted to prove that it took its name seriously and was genuinely supportive of the State. The Social Democrats, on the other hand, were naturally in no position to approve of Hitler's bill, for he had announced their removal from all public offices and even threatened their extermination in countless speeches.

Not a single deputy voiced objections to the Chancellor's foreign policy program. The entire Reichstag, including the Social Democrats, declared its unanimous consent¹⁴⁶ both in this session on March 23 and in a further session on May 17—in spite of the fact that Hitler's foreign policy program represented the largest threat to the nation.

The terms of Germany's domestic policy, i.e. whether or not the Germans engaged in a civil war, whether the country was governed by a dictatorship or a democracy—even whether or not the Jews were persecuted—were questions which received only marginal attention abroad. Never would any of these domestic matters have incited foreign powers to launch a military intervention against Hitler. Conversely, the foreign policy aims of the German Government did indeed command attention abroad.

March 23, 1933

The flattering words with which Hitler addressed England, France, Italy, and the Soviet Union in his March 23 statement of policy carried no real weight. The real blueprint revealing his future foreign policy was the program he had laid down in *Mein Kampf* and expounded in numerous earlier speeches. Even if one dismissed as unrealistic folly the idea of a new German Reich formed by conquering *Lebensraum* in the East, there still remained Hitler's goal of disposing of the Treaty of Versailles—an all too real element of his foreign policy program.

There is a general reluctance in Germany to think an uncomfortable matter through to its final consequences. Hitler's program of abolishing the Treaty of Versailles ultimately meant a restoration of the borders of 1914; this, however, entailed war with Poland; war with Poland also meant war with the Western Powers—and hence Germany's military ruin. The deputies did not dwell on these unpleasant thoughts on March 23. Spokesmen for party after party, the Social Democrats included, stood up and declared their respective party's consensus with Hitler's statements on foreign policy. After all, no one wanted to seem anti-national. Ever since 1914, the German Social Democratic Party had lowered its colors whenever the talk had turned to nationalism for fear of being judged unreliable in national matters.

The speech denouncing Hitler's Enabling Act delivered by the Social Democratic deputy Otto Wels was remarkably weak. It might have been expected that he would at least take a stand against the "stab-in-the back" legend; for although Hitler had refrained from mentioning it in his policy statement, he had repeated it often enough in other speeches. Wels chose instead to demonstrate how very 'national' he and the Social Democrats had conducted themselves since 1918. His remarks were confined to domestic issues. Wels protested against the persecution suffered by his fellow party members throughout the country. In touching this topic, however, he made himself vulnerable to counter-attacks, for the Social Democratic rulers, particularly in Prussia, had not exactly been gentle in their treatment of National Socialists during the preceding years.

Thus Hitler took advantage of this chance to settle this special account with the Social Democratic Party one last time. He took notes during Wels' speech and, at its close, once more stepped to the rostrum. If anyone still harbored the suspicion that Hitler had a ghostwriter prepare his speeches, he now learned the error of his ways. No one could have written a rejoinder to Wels' unscheduled speech in that short time.