

Background: After the death of Hindenburg on 2 August 1934, Hitler called a referendum to approve his assumption of full power as Führer and Chancellor of Germany. Rudolf Hess gave this speech on 14 August 1934, shortly before the 19 August referendum in which 90% of the voters approved Hitler's increased powers.

The source: "Die Wahl Adolf Hitlers zum Führer," in Rudolf Hess, *Reden* (Munich: Zentralverlag der NSDAP., 1938), pp. 52-63.

Electing Adolf Hitler Führer

by Rudolf Hess

National Socialists! Fellow German citizens!

I have rarely given a speech as difficult as this one. It is a challenge to attempt to prove the good of something as obvious as Hitler's assumption of Hindenburg's position. For fourteen years I have been convinced that he is the only man able to master Germany's fate. This conviction has grown over the years, as the original emotional feeling found new support in endless ways that have demonstrated Adolf Hitler's remarkable leadership abilities. It is hard for me, now that I see the realization of fourteen years of hopes, to gather the various reasons that explain how Adolf Hitler has become the highest and only Führer of the German people.

Whether through good luck or providence, I found in the summer of 1920 a small room in the Sterneckerbräu in which one Adolf Hitler, whom I had never heard of, gave a speech to a few dozen people. His clear, logical and persuasive speech laid out a new political program. This man expressed my own vague feelings as a veteran of the war, making clear what was necessary for the nation's salvation. He outlined a new Germany from the heart of a front soldier, a Germany that I suddenly realized was the one that had to become reality!

This man had driving passion, persuasive logic, and astonishing knowledge. A powerful faith streamed from him — I had never experienced its like. What was most remarkable was that I and the other entirely rational members of the audience did not laugh as he in all seriousness explained that the flag of the new movement for which he and his movement fought would one day fly over the Reichstag, over the Palace of Berlin, indeed over every German building. It would be the victorious symbol of a new, honorable, nationalist and socialist Germany.

At that moment in the Sterneckerbräu there were really only two possibilities. Either I would leave this fool immediately, or — as I did — accept the conviction: This man will save Germany, if anyone can!

I pledged my conviction to a friend, and on that very evening become the most passionate admirer and loyal follower of this Führer.

In the long years that followed, the rest of the world laughed and mocked us, and the newspapers spread their poison and scorn about this "madman," but nothing could shake my faith and readiness to give my all for this man, so long as he did not lose faith in himself or his mission.

I remember well even today a visit I made to Hitler in the small room he sublet in Munich. He raged against a Munich newspaper that mocked him and his idea. "I will show them whether I am to be taken seriously or not," he exclaimed.

Still, his opponents did not take him seriously then, or for many years after. Luckily so! For the most

serious error his enemies made was that they did not recognize early enough what a danger he was to them. They missed the opportunity to destroy him and his small following when it was still possible. The mighty tree of today, able to withstand any storm, was then only a tender plant.

But like so many other things in the Führer's life, fate probably determined that those around him were blind enough to lose valuable time by fighting him only with ridicule. Providence, of which the Führer often speaks with such faith, preserved him and his movement from destruction, preserving both for its purposes.

I knew Adolf Hitler as he walked through the streets of Munich in a shabby gray coat, often hungry, accompanied only by a few friends, posting flyers. He was armed only with a thick oak walking stick, which he only too often had to use when his opponents from the then USPD, or the Spartakus Bund, or some middle class party found the primitive truths on these flyers unpleasant.

I can still remember how he, at the head of his "whole party" broke up a meeting of Bavarian separatists, always putting himself in the way of the greatest danger. Astonishingly, amidst all the daily tasks and annoyances, he never lost sight of the larger goal. He always presented his vision vividly to his followers.

In later years I saw this man during the triumphs and defeats of his movement. At the moments of the worst defeats when his followers often were near desperation, it was always he who restored the faith of the doubters, gave them new enthusiasm, new faith. I was with him in the Landsberg prison, when all seemed lost and his movement disintegrated as his subordinates fought. I remember when there was the danger that his parole would be canceled and he would have to stay behind bars for another four or five years! The chances of realizing his ideas seemed absolutely nonexistent then, but at that very moment he laid out the methods he would use to rebuild the movement under the new circumstances and by rejecting illegal methods. Then as always he proved himself a master at adapting to new situations, in breaking radically with methods he saw as outdated or ineffective.

With the certainty of a great leader, in the middle of what seemed to be the total collapse of all his efforts, he explained to me that he would need several years to rebuild the movement, and that it would be seven years before he had the power to force his enemies to bend to his will. That was in the winter of 1924/25. Seven years later it was 1932!

That was the year in which the forces of the past attempted in vain to stop the final victory of National Socialism, the year in which every attempt to stop Adolf Hitler and his movement failed, in which in fact every shameless lying attack worked in the end to his advantage.

The Führer said more often than in the past: "The others can do what they want. When an idea is right, when it is fought for consistently, when the movement that fights for it is well organized, and when the leadership is determined to go its way regardless of the difficulties, one day with mathematical certainty it will be victorious! The longer they succeed in holding back our victory, the more powerful it will be! It will fall into our laps like overripe fruit!"

These words from the decisive year 1932 explain the sudden and total National Socialist seizure of power in 1933, which so surprised the rest of the world.

Looking back I am convinced that our delayed victory, the fourteen years that sometimes seemed to us as if they would never end, was fate's way of preparing our people for the seizure of power. It was a necessity of fate, just as the early death of the Führer's parents acquainted him with bitter poverty. That poverty forced him to become a construction worker. He came to understand the poverty of his fellow human beings and the lot of the "proletariat." The daily struggle for survival in the primitive cultural conditions of the era gave the Führer a deep understanding of his fellow working class citizens.

It was also a necessity of fate that he served at the front during the World War, for he learned a contempt of danger. He became hard. The war brought him together with all levels of the German people and showed him the destructiveness of class and rank. Most importantly, it taught him to understand the people and to speak their language.

The revolutionary year 1918 was a necessity of fate for Adolf Hitler, for despite its criminal leadership it cleared away relics of the past that later would have created difficulties for the National Socialist Revolution. And the revolt of 1918 brought signs of collapse and revealed with naked clarity the international forces and their destructive effects on Germany in a way that created the psychological prerequisites that enabled the hard measures of the later National Socialist government to succeed.

The attempt to seize power in November 1923 was ordained by fate, just as was its bloody collapse. If the Führer had not acted then, the masses would later have lost faith in him as a Führer when he constantly called for patience and postponed the seizure of power. Only his willingness to act resolutely when necessary, as demonstrated in November 1923, provided the proof that he would when necessary take the most forceful course. It proved that he chose to renounce force in the years before 1933 not because he was a coward. And National Socialism could not have taken power in 1923, since the people were not yet ready for National Socialism, nor was National Socialism ready to lead the people. What was obvious to everyone in Germany in 1933 would have seemed arrogance in 1923. The supporters of the parties of that day had not yet had sufficient time to recognize the weaknesses of their leaders.

The narrowest chance of fate prevented the Führer from entering the government in 1932. He would have been joined with men who inwardly were still his enemies and would have caused great damage as members of the government.

And surely it was providence that preserved the life of the old Field Marshall and Reich President to enable his good name and protecting hand to guard the young National Socialist government until Adolf Hitler's abilities as a leader had been proven to everyone at home and abroad, until his reputation was sufficient to assume the full leadership of the Reich.

Providence has clearly been at work in Adolf Hitler's life. Only so can we understand how this man, the son of a minor official, withstood hunger and privation and fought unaided powerful enemies in the press and business, powerful parties at home and abroad, to become the Führer of one of the great nations of the world, chancellor of the German Reich, holder of the office of Reich President. This is a miracle without precedent in the history of the world. In the midst of bitter need, a people finds the man to rescue it. There is a force of history at work here which we still do not understand.

The need of our people was great. A great man was required to meet it.

Providence gave him the gifts and the strength to move on both in good times and bad, enabling him over the course of time to reach his goal: the salvation of Germany!

Providence works through in a way both inexplicable yet clear to all who have the good fortune to be near to him. How often has he said to me: "I know that my decision or action is correct. I cannot explain at the moment why, but I feel that it is right and the future will prove it so." Invariably the course of events proved that the inexplicable feelings of the Führer led him down a sure path.

The great historian Treitschke held the ability to see things correctly as the decisive ability of a statesman, more important even than talent. What leader has ever had this ability more than Adolf Hitler? The proof is in his speeches, even those from 1920. Rarely have political conditions and developments been predicted more accurately, seldom have conclusions been drawn more clearly, thanks to his ability to see the fundamental nature of the most difficult and complicated things.

The “simple understanding” of the genius is able to see the essential and the obvious.

The Führer adds to the ability to see correctly, which the historian sees as more critical than talent, not only talent, but also genius. The ability to see correctly, along with genius, to which must be added the workings of providence, gives us an explanation for the miracle that has happened before our eyes in the past few years, particularly since Hitler’s assumption of power.

Is not the transformation of our people a miracle! It shows itself in its return to its essence, to the sources of its strength, in its reawakening pride and honor, in its will to self assertion in the world, in its ability to free itself from international poisons and from signs of corruption in all areas of life! Is it a miracle that Adolf Hitler won the battle against unemployment in so short a time? That he put people to work to meet daily needs as well as to advance culture? The great highways, canals and buildings will proclaim to coming generations the Hitler Era of the German people. Is it not a miracle that a nation once divided by class and rank, divided by petty state pride in Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony and elsewhere — now works together with mutual understanding for the great common tasks and for the preservation of the nation and its people?

As I said when I began, I cannot explain why Hitler, and only he, can be the Führer. Who could suggest someone worthier and more able to fill the office of Reich President, the highest leader of the Reich?

Someone might say that it is not good to put all power in one hand. Let me reply that in a difficult time the Romans gave full power to a young and capable leader — and the Romans knew something about governing! They knew that “men make history.” They knew that in times of crisis, strong personalities must guide the state, personalities bound to the living essence of their people.

Someone may say that it is not good to put all power in one hand, since Adolf Hitler might use his authority arbitrarily and thoughtlessly!

To that I can only say: The conscience of a moral personality is a far greater protection against the misuse of an office than is the supervision of parliament or the separation of powers. I know no one who has a stronger conscience, or is more true to his people, than Adolf Hitler.

Over the years I have seen him struggle to make difficult decisions, always checking again and again with the experts in the field until he was certain that his decision was absolutely correct. I know how many sleepless nights his decision to take Germany out of the League of Nations cost him, how he listened to all who had objections. I know that he was unable to rest until he had refuted them by clear logic. Only then did he decide, and accepted the full responsibility.

The Führer’s highest court is his conscience and his responsibility to his people and to history.

He will also from time to time allow the people itself to pass judgment on his general policy. This will regularly reaffirm his leadership.

He knows that both his honor and his work are at risk. He cannot pass the responsibility for his decisions to irresponsible parliamentary majorities, as do the statesmen of all other nations. That also means that his freedom of action is not restricted or watered down by parliamentary bodies or other forces. This above all is why in desperate times people and nations need an absolute leader — assuming he possesses the necessary abilities — and why such a leader can be necessary to the continued existence of the government and people.

Treitschke said that absolute leadership is either the best or the worst form of government, depending on the personality of the leader. We know that Adolf Hitler is both born and called to be a leader, and that he has shown himself through all his actions to be a morally upright person. As sole ruler he is the best possible form of government for Germany — and heaven knows that in its current crisis Germany needs the best possible form of government!

A Führer whose goal is to serve his people is in times of crisis a better guarantee of peace to other nations than is a parliamentary majority, which may lack the will at the critical moment to keep its people from stumbling into misfortune, as Lloyd George suggested the nations stumbled into the World War. In recent weeks, Adolf Hitler has made rapid and firm decisions advancing the cause of peace in Europe that demonstrate his statesmanship. Those states who today oppose us may not be willing to admit it, but history will.

German citizens! Consider with all seriousness the international significance of the referendum on 19 August. Talk with everyone in your circle of acquaintances — family members, workmates, relatives, with everyone you come in contact with. Remember that the world is watching to see if a united German people will be loyal to its Führer.

Hundreds of thousands of journalists are waiting to announce the expected collapse of National Socialism to their readers. They will do this if even a few less Germans go to the polls than did on 12 November of last year. They hope for a collapse of National Socialism, for they know this would mean the collapse of Germany.

By voting yes on 19 August, the German people will demonstrate to the world that we see in Adolf Hitler the Führer given to us by providence. We Germans approve of what he has done at home and abroad for Germany and trust his decisions for the future. Germany sees Adolf Hitler as Hindenburg's proper successor. The entire German people now gives Hitler the name of honor that the National Socialist movement has long given him: the Führer!

This word is more than a title, it is a confession and a certainty: My Führer!

Furthermore, the entire German people says to the world: Adolf Hitler is and will remain our Führer, because his policies are the policies of the entire German nation. His rule guarantees Germany's stability. Through him and his movement, Germany has become a unified Reich. Since we want to remain a united German Reich, we want Adolf Hitler at our head. Since we know that power struggles between individuals or interest groups are unthinkable and impossible under his leadership, we want him as Germany's leader.

Through him, Fate realizes its purpose: Saving Germany from the hunger and misery of Bolshevism. We firmly believe that saving Germany from Bolshevism also rescued Europe from the danger of red annihilation. We Germans see it as our duty to thank Fate by affirming this man as the Führer of Germany.

One more thing the German people want to say to the world on 19 August: We want the work begun in Hitler's name to continue: the battle against unemployment, the freeing of our conscience, the moral renewal of Germany's youth, the strengthening of our sense of honor. We Germans know that Hitler wants what we all want: economic equality with the other nations of the world, the political and military peace with the other peoples of the world, a return to prosperity and culture after decades of decline and decay.

This we say to our Führer on 19 August: We are bound to you in an indissoluble unity in the fight for Germany's future. With you, we long for the preservation of peace and are prepared to follow your command to defend our people's peace.

We are proud and happy to have one of history's greats, a son of our people, among us during our life times. The yes that we give affirms his leadership to the world, and thanks him at the same time.

German workers! I speak particularly to you. Be proud that you may on 19 August affirm as leader of Germany a man of the German working class. Be proud that you may symbolically say to one of your own on 19 August: We want you, Adolf Hitler, as German Chancellor and German Reich President,

you, a German worker! Where once kings, Kaisers and presidents ruled Germany, now by our will and the will of the German people stands for the first time a German worker. He is a worker who knows how hard the life of his former comrades still is, those who must struggle daily for their basic needs, and whose goal is above all to improve their lot as quickly as possible.

My fellow German citizens! You will vote yes for Adolf Hitler! And if you are asked why you voted for him, you will be able to answer:

We voted for Adolf Hitler:

Because he is the man who from his experiences as a Front soldier developed a world view that is the foundation for all that is happening in Germany.

Because his fifteen year struggle against a hostile world is a model of strength and courage.

Because he always acts at the right moment, thereby showing that he is a heroic leader.

Because he does nothing for himself, but everything for Germany and for the future of his people.

Because he has given all of us a new faith in Germany.

Because he has given our lives meaning once more by showing us why we Germans are on the earth.

Because he is the instrument of the will of a higher power.

In sum, because he is a true Führer!

With our “yes” votes, we Germans will say on 19 August:

To you, our Führer, we pledge our loyalty — Adolf Hitler, we believe in you!