



HITLER *A Life*

PETER LONGERICH

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Translated by Jeremy Noakes and Lesley Sharpe

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Munich, October 2015

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Abbreviations

(A)	Abendausgabe (evening edition)
AA	Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office)
<i>ADAP</i>	<i>Akten zur deutschen auswärtigen Politik</i>
AHA	Allgemeines Heeresamt
(B)	Berlin edition
BAB	Bundesarchiv, Abt. Berlin
BAF	Bundesarchiv, Abt. Freiburg
BAK	Bundesarchiv, Abt. Koblenz
BDC	Berlin Document Center
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel
BHStA	Bayrisches Hauptstaatsarchiv
<i>BK</i>	<i>Bayerischer Kurier</i>
BMP	Bayerische Mittelpartei
<i>BT</i>	<i>Berliner Tageblatt</i>
BVG	Berliner Verkehrsbetriebe
BVP	Bayerische Volkspartei
ČSR	Tschechoslowakische Republik (Československ. republika)
DAF	Deutsche Arbeitsfront
DAP	Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
<i>DAZ</i>	<i>Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
<i>DBFP</i>	<i>Documents on British Foreign Policy</i>
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DNB	Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
Domarus	Hitler, Adolf, <i>Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945</i> , ed. Max Domarus
DSP	Deutschsozialistische Partei
DStP	Deutsche Staatspartei
DVFP	Deutschvölkische Freiheitspartei
<i>FRUS</i>	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>

FZ	<i>Frankfurter Zeitung</i>
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police)
Goebbels TB	<i>The Diaries of Joseph Goebbels</i>
GPU	Vereinigte staatliche politische Verwaltung (Gossudarstwennoje Polititscheskoje Uprawlenije)
Gruppenkdo.	Gruppenkommando
GVG	Grossdeutsche Volksgemeinschaft
GWU	<i>Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht</i>
HJ	Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth)
HL	Heeresleitung
HSSPF	Höherer SS- und Polizeiführer
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich
IMT	<i>International Military Tribunal</i>
Inf.Rgt.	Infanterieregiment
JK	<i>Hitler. Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905–1924</i> , ed. Eberhard Jäckel and Axel Kuhn
KAM	Kriegsarchiv München
KdF	Kraft durch Freude
Kp.	Kompanie
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
KPdSU	Kommunistische Partei der Sowjetunion
KTB	Kriegstagebuch (war diary)
KTB OKW	<i>Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht</i> (<i>Wehrmachtführungsstab</i>)
KTB Seekriegsleitung	<i>Das Kriegstagebuch der Seekriegsleitung</i>
k.u.k.	kaiserlich und königlich
KZ	Konzentrationslager
LA Berlin	Landesarchiv Berlin
LHA	Landeshauptarchiv Linz
LT	<i>Linzer Tagespost</i>
(M)	Middy edition; in the case of VB, Munich edition
MB	<i>Münchener Beobachter</i>
MGM	<i>Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen</i>
MK	Hitler, Adolf, <i>Mein Kampf</i>
MNN	<i>Münchner Neueste Nachrichten</i>
Ms.	Manuskript
MSPD	Mehrheitssozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
(N)	Norddeutsche Ausgabe (North-German edition)

NARA	US National Archives and Records Administration, Washington
NL	Nachlass (private papers)
NS	nationalsozialistisch/Nationalsozialismus
NSBO	Nationalsozialistische Betriebszellenorganisation
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
NSDStB	Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund
NSFB	Nationalsozialistische Freiheitsbewegung
NSKK	Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps
NSV	Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt
<i>NZZ</i>	<i>Neue Zürcher Zeitung</i>
OA	Oberabschnitt
OA Moskau	Osobyi Archive, Moskow
OB	Oberbefehlshaber (commander-in-chief)
OBdH	Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres (c-in-c of the army)
OKM	Oberkommando der Marine (navy high command)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (armed forces high command)
ÖStA	Österreichisches Staatsarchiv
PA	NS-Pressenanweisungen der Vorkriegszeit
PAA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Berlin
PolDir.	Polizeidirektion
PrGS	Preussische Gesetzsammlung
(R)	Reichsausgabe
RAD	Reichsarbeitsdienst
RDI	Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie
RFM	Reichsfinanzministerium
RFSS	Reichsführer-SS
RGBl.	Reichsgesetzblatt
RIB	Reserve-Infanterie-Brigade
RIR	Reserve-Infanterie-Regiment
RM	Reichsmark
RMBliV	Reichsministerialblatt für die innere Verwaltung
RMI	Reichsministerium des Innern
RPL	Reichspropagandaleitung
RSA	Hitler, Adolf, Reden, Schriften, Anordnungen
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt
RVE	Reichsvereinigung Eisen

SA	Sturmabteilung
SAM	Staatsarchiv München
SD	Sicherheitsdienst
Sopade	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands im Exil
<i>Sopade</i>	<i>Deutschland-Berichte der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands Sopade 1934–1940</i>
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SprkAkte	Spruchkammerakte
SS	Schutzstaffel
StA Riga	Staatsarchiv, Riga
StAnw.	Staatsanwaltschaft
<i>StJb</i>	<i>Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich</i>
TB	Tagebuch (diary)
TP	Tagesparole
<i>TWC</i>	<i>Trials of War Criminals before the Nuernberg Military Tribunals</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ursachen und Folgen. Vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart</i> , ed. Herbert Michaelis and Ernst Schraepfer
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
<i>UWW</i>	<i>Unser Wille und Weg</i>
<i>VB</i>	<i>Völkischer Beobachter</i>
<i>VEJ</i>	<i>Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945</i>
<i>VfZ</i>	<i>Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte</i>
<i>VK</i>	<i>Völkischer Kurier</i>
<i>VZ</i>	<i>Vossische Zeitung</i>
YV	Yad Vashem
ZStL	Zentrale Stelle Lugwigsburg
1. M.	Erstes Morgenblatt (first morning edition)
2. M.	Zweites Morgenblatt (second morning edition)

Introduction

Arguably no individual in modern history has managed to accumulate such immense power in such a relatively short space of time as Adolf Hitler; no-one else has abused power so extravagantly and finally clung on to it so tenaciously, to the point where his regime collapsed totally, with the loss of millions of lives. Hitler is thus an extreme example of how personal power can be acquired and monstrously abused – a phenomenon that bursts the confines of a conventional historical biography. In Hitler's case even the interpretative model frequently employed by historians of exploring the interaction of structural factors and individual personality is inadequate. For we are dealing with a figure who did not exercise power within the framework of established constitutional politics or the generally accepted rules of a political system, but instead dismantled this framework and created new structures of power to suit himself. These structures were indissolubly linked to him personally, and indeed in general his dictatorship represented an extraordinary example of personalized power. The regime's 'structures' are inconceivable without Hitler and Hitler is nothing without his offices.

Yet at the same time this dictatorship cannot be reduced to Hitler as an individual or explained in anything like adequate terms by his biography. We must instead adopt a much broader view that takes in the history of the period as a whole: for example, the phenomenon of National Socialism, its causes and roots in German history, and the relationship between Hitler and 'the Germans', to name but a few factors. While any interpretation that dwells too much on Hitler himself risks falling into 'Hitlerism' and begins to read like an apologia, any comprehensive examination of the historical circumstances and conditions runs the opposite danger of losing sight of Hitler as an agent and presenting him as a mere puppet of external forces, a blank screen on which contemporary movements are projected. That would result in Hitler, of all people, being marginalized as a figure of historical

importance and his personal responsibility within this historical process being obscured.

The main challenge of a Hitler biography is thus to explain how such an extreme concentration of power in the hands of a single individual could arise from the interplay of external circumstances and the actions of that individual. On the one hand, it must present the forces that acted upon Hitler and, on the other, those that were set in motion by him.

Contrary to a widely-held view, our present-day knowledge of National Socialism is by no means complete or even close to being complete. Historical research into National Socialism has developed many specialized branches and is constantly bringing new knowledge to light on a very wide range of aspects of the movement and the regime. One thing becomes clear from looking at a cross-section of these studies, namely that Hitler was actively involved in the most disparate areas of politics to a much greater extent than has hitherto been generally assumed. He himself created the conditions in which this could happen, by bringing about the step-by-step fragmentation of the traditional state apparatus of power into its component parts, ensuring that no new and transparent power structures developed, and instead giving far-reaching tasks to individuals who were personally answerable to him. This consistently personalized leadership style gave him the opportunity to intervene largely at will in the most diverse areas, and, as the scholarship of the last two decades in particular has demonstrated, he made liberal use of these opportunities. However, as the structures of power in Hitler's regime were diffuse, there is no consolidated and comprehensive collection of sources relating to Hitler's exercise of that power; it is the mosaic produced by the numerous studies of specific areas that reveals Hitler's decision-making as wide-ranging and frequently informal. It is becoming increasingly evident that in a whole series of key political areas he really did hold the reins and involve himself (though with varying degrees of intensity at different times and in different spheres) in matters of detail, on top of dealing with the business of day-to-day politics. This will become clear not only in the realm of foreign policy, but also in particular with regard to the persecution of the Jews and the Nazi state's eugenic policies, constitutional issues, rearmament (along with efforts to balance its economic impact), Church and cultural policy, propaganda, and a complex set of issues connected with managing the Party. During the war new areas were added: the military command of the Wehrmacht and its supplies and equipment, as

well as matters of importance to the home front such as food supplies and female labour.

In the course of time Hitler created for himself immense scope for his own activity and indeed in some areas of politics he was virtually autonomous. He was capable of deciding on war or peace, he established the foundations of the European continent's 'new order' as he saw fit, and he made arbitrary decisions about genocide and other programmes of mass murder on the basis of 'racial' factors. Yet although this freedom of action Hitler enjoyed was probably unique in modern European history, it nevertheless arose from historical preconditions and was certainly not limitless.

The most important of these preconditions was the emergence of an extreme right-wing mass movement as a reaction to defeat in war, revolution, and the Versailles Treaty, and to the world economic crisis and the failure of democracy to tackle this crisis. Additional potent factors present in German society and in particular among the elites – nationalism, authoritarianism, racism, militarism, revisionist attitudes in foreign policy, and imperialism – could be exploited by this mass movement, once it had come to power. And not least among the historical factors that smoothed the way for Hitler was the fact that countervailing forces, in the first instance inside Germany itself and then later within the European context, were incapable of putting up adequate resistance, did not exist at all, or failed. Thus Hitler really was in a position, first in Germany in 1933/34 and then in Europe during 1938–41, to create *tabula rasa* and to realize many of his plans in the power vacuum that had come about through the destruction of established orders.

Hitler acted not simply as a 'catalyser' or 'medium' for historical processes that existed independently of him.¹ Rather, he shaped these in a very distinct and highly individual manner by channelling, reinforcing, and concentrating existing forces and energies, while mobilizing dormant but potential ones, and by exploiting ruthlessly the weakness or passivity of his opponents and deliberately destroying them. Although in the process he took account of tactical considerations, his political priorities were unambiguous: from the beginning of his career the notion of an empire ['Reich'] ordered on racial lines was central. For two and a half decades he never wavered from this. With regard to the external borders and the structure of this empire, however, and to the time-scale and means to achieve this aim he proved extraordinarily flexible. Hitler's political strategy can no more be explained

by positing a 'programme' or a 'phased plan' (which was a central element in the interpretation advanced by the 'intentionalist' school of historians²) than it can by the notion of some kind of unbridled opportunism.³ The challenge is rather to account for this special blend in Hitler of obsession with a utopian goal combined at times with unscrupulous pragmatism; the latter propensity could amount almost to a reversal of ends and means. The figure who emerges is not so much a political strategist or ideologue as above all a ruthless, hands-on politician. I argue in this biography that critical turning points in Hitler's policies cannot be seen as the result of external constraints and structural determinants but were the product of decisions he forced through in the face of resistance and significant retarding factors.

Yet Hitler could not always have his way. This is true, first of all, of his core domestic policy, namely the attempt to produce a population that was completely bound by solidarity and geared to war. It is also true of his efforts to make his 'racial policies' popular with the population at large and of his radical anti-Church policies. Again, during the war he was unsuccessful in reconciling the conflicting aims of his occupation policy and his alliance policy in a single strategy that could fully mobilize the resources of the territory he controlled to support the war he was waging.

What then were the foundations of this dictator's extraordinarily extensive powers? The idea that Hitler's regime was primarily based on charisma and thus derived above all from the enthusiastic assent to his policies on the part of a large majority of the German nation, who credited him with super-human abilities, is most definitely inadequate. For any attempt to interpret him as expressing the longings and hopes of 'the Germans' comes up against the fact that, before National Socialism came on the scene, German society was split into various camps and even the Nazi state was able only to a very limited extent to build bridges between them. The Nazi 'national community', united in solidarity behind Hitler, turns out more than anything to be an invention of contemporary propaganda. Hitler's 'charisma' is not primarily the result of the masses believing him to possess extraordinary abilities (let alone of his actually having any), but rather, in an age of mass media, bureaucracy, and social control, is more than anything the product of a sophisticated use of technical means to exert power.

This approach has two consequences for the analysis I am offering: First, by contrast with the 'structural' analysis put forward by Ian Kershaw in his Hitler biography, this study does not explain Hitler as a phenomenon primarily on the basis of social forces and the complex of factors that

determined the Nazi system of power.⁴ My contention is that we have to abandon once and for all the image of a man who, overshadowed by his own charisma, allegedly became increasingly estranged from reality, let things take their course, and to a great extent withdrew from actual politics. This is the view of Hitler as an, in many respects, 'weak dictator', as Hans Mommsen pithily summed up this thesis.⁵ Instead I emphasize Hitler's autonomous role as an active politician. Secondly, I examine critically the claim often made that 'the Germans' largely welcomed Hitler's policies and identified with their dictator as a person. The result is a more nuanced picture: Throughout his dictatorship there was both active support from broad sections of the population and a significant undercurrent of discontent and reserve. The fact that Hitler's regime nevertheless functioned more or less without a hitch was above all the result (and this factor is frequently underplayed) of the various means of coercion available to a dictatorship. In addition to institutionalized repression there was the Party's local surveillance of 'national comrades', as well as Nazi control of the 'public sphere'.

Over and above the specifics of their lives, biographies of politicians who direct and control complex systems of power provide insight into the distinguishing features of power structures and decision-making processes, in particular when, as in this case, these structures and processes were created in large measure by the protagonist himself. In addition, as a result of his presence in a variety of political spheres Hitler was repeatedly able to reconfigure complex and problematic situations to suit his purposes by 'dropping a bombshell'. What is more, the history of the Nazi dictatorship as told from the perspective of the man who stood at the pinnacle of this structure provides insights into the connections between the individual political spheres in the so-called Third Reich and creates an opportunity to combine the specialized discourses developed by historians in their particular fields in an overview linked by a single, overarching chronology. Thus a biography of Hitler also produces a history of his regime.

Joachim Fest's dictum that Hitler was basically a 'non-person'⁶ is typical of the prevalent disinclination of historians to encounter Hitler on a 'human' level. By contrast, this biography assumes that, in common with everyone, Hitler had a personality, that this personality demonstrates certain constants, developments, and discontinuities that can be described and analysed, and that this analysis of his personality can be productive in explaining his political career. This personal element not only played a significant role in some important political decisions, but it contributed fundamentally to his

political outlook as a whole. Thus the behaviour and attitudes of a dictator in possession of absolute power were necessarily and fatefully influenced by his deeply rooted tendency to develop megalomaniacal plans and projects, by his inability to accept humiliations and defeats, and by the resulting reflex to react to his fear of obstacles and opposition by a strategy of annihilation. Whenever Hitler's use of this absolute power is being discussed, these personality factors must be given due weight, though not to the extent of reducing his decision-making and policies to them alone. Hitler's psyche, his emotions, his physical being, his life-style, his interactions with others and so on – such aspects cannot replace analysis of complex historical material, but nor can they be treated in a voyeuristic manner in a special chapter called 'Hitler, the private man'. Rather, the challenge is to view them as integral to this person and, where fruitful, to make them part of the biography.⁷

By writing his autobiographical work *Mein Kampf* [My Struggle], Hitler, supported by the Nazi propaganda machine, later contributed significantly to the creation and manipulation of his own history. Whereas he described his pre-1914 years as a time when he taught himself the things that laid the foundation for his political career, this version was frequently reinterpreted after the Second World War as the history of a failure, who in the narrow provincial world of Linz, in the slums of Vienna, and in the cafés of Munich internalized the resentments that he was then able to act out in his later life. Yet this interpretation too reads purpose and linearity into Hitler's development when there is in fact no evidence for these. Hitler's extraordinary later career – and this is my focus in this book – cannot be explained by the first three decades of his life. It is therefore important to resist later reinterpretations and exaggerations. Only then do we see clearly that what we are dealing with is no more or less than the history of a nobody.

Prologue

A Nobody

A genius. That was how Hitler saw himself and how he wanted others to see him. Though unrecognized at first, he had, the story went, followed the path predestined for him, thanks to his exceptional abilities, his strength of will, and his determination. Hitler invested a considerable amount of effort in creating this perception of himself. It was at the core of the image that he and his supporters spent a lifetime burnishing. Bound up with this image-making was his attempt to obscure his family background and to portray his childhood and youth as a preparation for his later role as politician and 'Führer'. He had good grounds for doing so, for when separated out from this subsequent 'narrative' and confined to the (relatively sparse) facts that can count as assured, Hitler's early life presents a very different picture. While providing insights into the development of the young Hitler's personality, these facts also show that his first thirty years gave no inkling of his future career.¹

Hitler's ancestors came from the Waldviertel, a poor agricultural and forested region in the north-west of Lower Austria. In 1837 Hitler's father, Alois Schicklgruber, was born in the village of Strones near Dollersheim, the illegitimate son of Maria Anna Schicklgruber. Whether by chance or not, shortly after the Anschluss in 1938 both of these places were completely depopulated and destroyed when a large Wehrmacht training area was created.² It is not clear whether Alois was the son of a miller, Johann Georg Hiedler, whom Anna Schicklgruber married in 1842 and who died in 1857, or the offspring of a relationship with his younger brother, a peasant, Johann Nepomuk Hiedler. In any case, shortly before the early death of his mother in 1847, Johann Nepomuk took the boy to live with him in the village of Spital and, in 1876, with the aid of three witnesses and in a procedure of

very dubious legality, had his elder brother posthumously declared to be the boy's father.³ In future Alois used the name Hitler, a variation of 'Hiedler' that was common in the district. The dubious legality of this procedure (which was seemingly necessary so that Johann Nepomuk, who finally died in 1888, could make Alois his heir) has led to repeated speculation about the true identity of Alois's father. In 1932, for example, a rumour surfaced, exploited by Hitler's opponents,⁴ that Alois was the son of a Jew and so there was no way that his son, Adolf, could (according to his own criteria) claim to be a 'pure Aryan'. However, despite the persistence of this rumour, it has no basis in fact.⁵ Nevertheless, it is understandable that, in view of this and other scandalous rumours that kept emerging, Hitler had no interest in discussing his family background, particularly since Johann Nepomuk was also the grandfather of Hitler's mother, Klara Pözl. Given the doubts about who his grandfather was, Hitler's great-grandfather on his mother's side may also have been his grandfather on his father's side.

This uncertainty about Hitler's family history was not, in fact, untypical among the rural working class of this period and it continued into the next generation. To begin with, Alois Hitler concentrated on his career. Originally trained as a shoemaker, he managed to secure a post in the Austrian customs service and so acquired the status of a civil servant. In view of his poor educational qualifications this represented a significant career achievement. His first posting was to Braunau am Inn on the German–Austrian border in 1871.⁶

Alois Hitler was married three times and before that had already fathered an illegitimate child. His first marriage, to a woman fourteen years older than him, failed because she discovered his affair with a young servant girl. Alois lived with her and they had an illegitimate child (also called Alois), who was born in 1882. After the death of his wife they married and had another child, a daughter, Angela. The following year his wife became very ill and Alois employed Klara, his niece twice removed, to help out. She had already worked in his household as a maid and, even before his wife died, he had fathered a child with her. They married in January 1885, a papal dispensation being required because they were related. In 1885 Gustav, their first child arrived, followed by Ida a year later, and Otto the year after that. In the winter of 1887/88 they lost all three children, Otto dying shortly after birth, while Gustav and Ida succumbed to diphtheria. However, in 1888 Klara once again became pregnant and on 20 April 1889 her fourth child was born and given the name Adolf.

In 1892, the family – Klara, Adolf and his two half siblings – moved to Passau, to which Alois Hitler had been reassigned. In 1894 Edmund was born⁷ and Klara and the children stayed in Passau, while Alois spent his last year of service in 1894/5 in Linz. On receiving his pension Alois moved back to the country, buying a farm in Hafeld near Lambach for his retirement.⁸ However, he soon sold it and, after a brief stay in Lambach, in 1898 moved with his family to a small house in Leonding near Linz.⁹ By this time, the family had undergone further changes. In 1896 a daughter, Paula, was born; in the same year, fourteen-year-old, Alois (junior) had left home after a major quarrel with his father and been disinherited.¹⁰ In 1900, their son, Edmund, died of measles.¹¹

During the nineteenth century, marriage between relatives, illegitimate children, a lack of clarity over fatherhood, large numbers of births, and the frequent deaths of children were all characteristic of the lives of the rural working class. Alois Hitler succeeded in climbing out of this social class but, as far as his family life was concerned, continued to be part of it. Although he had achieved a relatively high status as a civil servant, his mind-set did not adjust to the ‘orderly’, petty bourgeois norms of his time and, significantly, on his retirement, he once more sought a rural milieu. It appears that his life was determined by this tension, a tension that Alois was able to overcome through his strong, even brutal, self-confidence. In most of the few surviving photographs he is shown in uniform. To his subordinates he was evidently a pedantic and strict superior who was not very approachable. After his retirement in the village environment of Lambach and Leonding, in which Adolf Hitler grew up, his father’s position as a former civil servant gave him a superior status. To the villagers he appeared lively and sociable.¹² However, this cheerfulness was mainly evident outside the house; at home he was an undisputed paterfamilias with distinctly despotic qualities, who frequently beat his children.¹³ In contrast to Klara, who was a regular churchgoer, he was anticlerical, a committed Liberal.

In 1903 Alois senior suddenly collapsed and died while drinking his morning glass of wine in the local pub. Reminiscences of him proved very varied. In an obituary in the *Linzer Tagespost* he was described as a ‘thoroughly progressively-minded man’ and, as such, a good friend of free schools, a reference to the fact that he supported Liberal efforts to reform the school system.¹⁴ He was described as ‘always good-humoured, marked indeed by a positively youthful cheerfulness’, a ‘keen singer’.¹⁵ Years later, the local peasant, Josef Mayrhofer, who was appointed Adolf Hitler’s guardian, painted a

totally different picture. Alois had been a 'grumpy, taciturn old man', 'a hard-line Liberal and like all Liberals of that period a staunch German Nationalist, a Pan-German, yet, surprisingly, still loyal to the Emperor'.¹⁶

Adolf Hitler himself later maintained that his relationship with his father was the key to the development of his personality. Yet a glance at his family history suggests that his relationship with his mother may well have been more significant. In Hitler's family death was very present: Adolf lost a total of four siblings, three before his own birth and then, aged eleven, his brother Edmund. Three years later, his father died and, finally, his mother, when he was seventeen.

The fact that his mother had lost her first three children before Adolf's birth and – everything points to this – had little emotional support from her husband, must have had a strong impact on her behaviour towards Adolf. We do not know how she responded to her fourth child. It is conceivable that she came across as an unfeeling mother, who after her painful losses was afraid to invest too much emotion in a child who might not survive. He would then have experienced her as cool, lacking in feeling, distant, an experience that would explain Hitler's own emotional underdevelopment, and also his tendency to try to assert his superiority over others and to seek refuge in megalomaniacal ideas of his own greatness. Or, on the other hand, his mother may have thoroughly spoiled her fourth child, placed all her hopes in the boy, and sought in him a substitute for the lack of a warm relationship with her husband. Being brought up as a mother's boy, as a little prince, and a domestic tyrant would be an equally satisfactory explanation for why Hitler, even in his early years, became convinced he was someone special and how, in the course of his development, his ability to form normal human relationships was severely damaged. This would explain the conflict with his father, whose very existence Adolf must have seen as a threat to his special role in the family. It would also mean that his relationship with his mother was more one of dependence than of a son's love for his mother. A combination of the 'dead' and the spoiling mother is also possible: Klara Hitler may, because of her losses, have treated her son during his first years with a lack of emotion and then, later on, have attempted to compensate for her neglect by showing excessive concern for him.¹⁷

The memoirs of Hitler's boyhood friend, August Kubizek, and his own recollections indicate that the spoiling mother is the more likely scenario. However, even without knowing the details of this mother-son relationship, it is possible (and that is what matters here) to find plausible arguments for

attributing Hitler's evident lack of feeling in his dealings with others, his marked egocentricity, his flight into a fantasy world focused on himself, in short, his narcissistic personality, to his family background.

Adolf Hitler himself emphasized his relationship with Alois, which he described as a classic father–son conflict. In *Mein Kampf* he maintains that, whereas as a ten-year-old he had hoped to go to university and so wanted to attend the humanist Gymnasium [grammar school], after he had finished primary school in 1900¹⁸ his father had sent him to the Realschule [vocational school] in order to prepare him for a subordinate career in the civil service. He had massively rebelled against this. At the age of twelve he had again clashed with his father over his decision to become an artist. Thus his poor school results allegedly resulted from his determination to get his way with his father.¹⁹

His results in the Realschule were indeed modest. He had to repeat his first year and in 1923 his class teacher, Huemer, reminisced that Hitler was 'definitely talented' (albeit 'one-sidedly'), but not particularly hard-working, and in addition, unbalanced, 'contrary, high-handed, self-opinionated, and irascible'.²⁰ In 1904, evidently as a result of another poor report, Adolf switched to the Realschule in Steyr, approximately forty kilometres away, where he stayed in lodgings. Hitler loathed the place, an attitude he retained for the rest of his life.²¹ In 1905 he once again failed to pass his exams and, thereupon, left school for good.²² An illness, which Hitler subsequently, and no doubt with much exaggeration, described as a 'serious lung complaint', seems to have made it easier to get his mother to accept that his school career had finally come to an end.²³

Linz

It was in Linz that Hitler received his first political impressions. They can be roughly reconstructed from the few statements he himself made in *Mein Kampf* and from the limited reminiscences of contemporaries. These must be set in the context of the political currents determining the political history of the city during the first decade of the twentieth century. From all this it is clear that Hitler's early political views were geared to the political–social milieu within which his family was situated.

At the start of the century, Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, was marked by artisan traditions, expanding industry, and a lively cultural scene. Between

1900 and 1907 the population increased from almost 59,000 to nearly 68,000.²⁴ Politically, as in the rest of Austria, three political camps had emerged: the Christian Socials, the German Nationalists, and the Social Democrats.²⁵ Against the background of the political mobilization of the masses, all three were competing with one another to take over from the previously dominant Liberals. In Linz, during the course of the 1890s, the German Nationalists had succeeded in winning this competition. Large sections of the population who were not tied to the Catholic Church had exchanged their liberal political ideals for nationalist ones. This was also true of Alois Hitler, whom Hitler's guardian, Mayrhofer, had described as 'Liberal' [i.e. anti-clerical], 'German Nationalist', and 'Pan-German', but also as 'loyal to the Emperor'.²⁶

Within the Austro-Hungarian empire the German Nationalists [Deutsch-freiheitliche] demanded the leadership role for the German Austrians within this multi-ethnic state and emphasized their links with the Germans in Bismarck's Reich. The majority were loyal to the Habsburg monarchy, but distinguished themselves from the Liberals and the Christian Socials in German Austria through their commitment to their 'German' identity. Their stance also had an anticlerical slant, for many German Nationalists suspected the Catholic Church of trying to strengthen the Slav elements within the empire. The Slavs (in Upper Austria and Linz this meant mainly the Czechs) were seen as the real threat, as their growing self-confidence and demand for equal treatment threatened the Germans' leadership role. This was being played out, in particular, through the so-called 'language dispute', which came to a head in the years after 1897. These political views found expression through the German People's Party [Deutsche Volkspartei], the dominant political force in Linz and Upper Austria.²⁷ Its main newspaper was the *Linzer Tagespost*, already referred to, a daily subscribed to by Hitler's father and which Hitler himself stated he had 'read from his earliest youth'. It was not of course by chance that the paper printed an obituary of his father.²⁸

From the 1890s onwards, the German Nationalists in Linz not only succeeded in winning votes in elections but also in establishing a well-integrated German Nationalist milieu. The gymnastics clubs, very much in the tradition of the 'Father of Gymnastics', Friedrich Ludwig Jahn,★ saw themselves

★ Translators' note: Friedrich Ludwig (Father) Jahn (1778–1852) established a nationalist gymnastic movement in 1811 to encourage and prepare young men to resist French occupation. Banned during the period of Reaction, the movement was revived in the 1860s as part of the campaign for German unification and over the following century became widespread throughout the German-speaking world.

as 'centres for fostering German national consciousness and patriotic-mindedness'²⁹ and were sympathetic to the German Nationalists.³⁰ The same was true of the General German Language Society [Allgemeiner Deutscher Sprachverein], which opposed the 'foreign infiltration' of the German language, and of the German School Association [Deutscher Schulverein], and the Association for the Defence of the Eastern Marches [Schutzverein Ostmark]. The latter, like other 'defence associations' with local branches in Linz, advocated strengthening the German element in the border provinces of Austria that were allegedly being threatened by alien 'ethnic groups'. Year after year, and with increasing enthusiasm, big festivals were staged, for example at the summer solstice, or to celebrate some jubilee, at which 'German' or, as the various announcements put it, 'Germanic' or 'ethnic German' [*völkisch*] customs and consciousness were cultivated and invoked.³¹ Thus, in reporting the 'Yule Festival' of the Jahn Gymnastics Club, the *Linzer Tagespost* considered it an 'exceptionally gratifying sign of the times' that 'ethnic German festivals, which are calculated to rekindle national feelings and sensibilities, are being attended, in particular by the upper classes of our city, with such enthusiasm and in such numbers'.³² Moreover, the German Nationalist associations were subsidized by the local council and, during the years after 1900, Linz often hosted supra-regional festivals of German Nationalist associations.³³

The struggle against the allegedly increasing influence of the Czechs in Upper Austria, against 'Slavization', was a standard topic in Linz. It was a classic case of a problem that was created by being discussed, a 'minority problem without a minority'.³⁴ In 1900 there were hardly more than 3,500 Czech speakers in Upper Austria. By 1910 that number had reduced to 2,000, a little more than 0.2 per cent of the population. Around half of this minority lived in Linz.³⁵ Nevertheless, from 1898 onwards, the German Nationalists used their presence in the Landtag [regional parliament] to keep pressing for German to be made the sole official language and language of instruction in Upper Austria. This provided a welcome opportunity to campaign in parliament and in the public sphere against the alleged threat of foreign influence. In 1909 this demand, which, given the small number of Czechs in Upper Austria, was a piece of pure demagoguery, was finally met, as it was in the monarchy's other German 'crown lands', by the passage of a provincial law.³⁶ The *Linzer Tagespost* reported regularly on German-Czech disputes, most of which occurred in Bohemia or Vienna. However, alleged manifestations of Czech nationalism in Upper Austria

were kept under suspicious review and dubbed Czech ‘presumption’ or ‘cheek’.³⁷ When, in 1903, a celebration was going to be held in a church to mark fifty years of services in the Czech language, the Linz city council passed a unanimous resolution condemning this ‘Czech nationalist demonstration’, urging local businesses in future only to employ ‘German assistants and apprentices’. The regional parliament also discussed the matter at length.³⁸ In 1904, a concert by the Czech violinist, Jan Kubelik, was prevented by riots; the world-famous musician had to flee the city down side streets. This was in response to demonstrations by Czech nationalists in Budweis and Prague and was reported with satisfaction by the *Tagespost*.³⁹

The Pan-Germans should also be included in the German Nationalist camp, viewed in a broader sense. They too believed in intimate national solidarity between the Austrian Germans and the Germans ‘in the Reich’. However, in contrast to the majority of the German Nationalists, who aimed at acquiring dominance within the Habsburg empire, the Pan-German supporters of Georg von Schönerer wished to follow the opposite path. They wanted to dissolve the empire, with the unambiguously Slav parts being given their independence and the German parts uniting with the Reich. In addition, they were committed to a racial form of anti-Semitism and a marked anti-clericalism. After the turn of the century this developed into the ‘Away from Rome’ movement, a mass conversion to Protestantism, which was seen as the Germans’ national religion.⁴⁰ However, in Linz the Pan-Germans were only a marginal group. Indeed, during the first decade of the new century, the years when Hitler was exposed to his first political impressions, the leaders of the German Nationalists distanced themselves from the Pan-Germans, forming an alliance with the Liberals, whom they could largely dominate. It was only after this constellation had suffered a heavy defeat in the Reichstag [imperial parliament] elections of 1911 that the Pan-Germans were integrated more closely into the German Nationalist camp.

The new political constellation after the turn of the century prompted the German Nationalists to refrain from the use of anti-Semitic slogans in the public sphere in order not to damage their relationship with the Liberals. They did, however, introduce the so-called Aryan clause, excluding Jews from membership, into the constitutions of all the associations of which, by 1900, they had acquired leadership from the Liberals.⁴¹ Nevertheless, they did not want to make too much of their hostility to the Jews; the ‘threat from the Czechs’ was a much more successful slogan.⁴² It appears, therefore,

entirely plausible when Hitler writes in *Mein Kampf* that his father was far from being anti-Semitic, not least because of his 'cosmopolitan views, which, despite his pronounced nationalist sentiments, not only remained intact but also rubbed off on me'. During his school days – there were a number of Jewish boys in the Linz Realschule – he himself had seen no reason to challenge this attitude. It was only when he was around fourteen or fifteen (he writes) that he, partly through political conversations, had come across the word 'Jew', which had engendered 'a slight distaste', 'an unpleasant feeling'.⁴³ In fact, there is no evidence that anti-Semitism played a dominant role in the Realschule in Linz that Hitler attended between 1900 and 1904.⁴⁴

Against the background of the 'nationalities dispute', with which the city was so preoccupied and in which the German Nationalists were so heavily engaged, the confrontation with the 'Slavs' played a much more important role in the life of the school. But in Hitler's school, as elsewhere, this conflict was largely fought against an imaginary opponent. For, contrary to Hitler's later statements that, growing up during the 'struggle on the frontier for German language, culture, and mentality', he had taken part in fights with Czech schoolmates,⁴⁵ in fact there were hardly any Czech-speaking pupils in the school; in 1903 there were precisely two. However, although Hitler's encounters with Czech schoolmates were a fantasy, they indicate that his life-long contempt for Czechs was rooted in the anti-Czech climate of his favourite city of Linz.

The Realschule in Linz was undoubtedly a hotbed of German Nationalism. Two of Hitler's teachers were active representatives of this movement: Leopold Poetsch, who taught him geography between 1901 and 1904 and history from 1900 to 1904, and Edward Huemer, Hitler's German and French teacher during this period. Poetsch was a local councillor for the German People's Party, and active in the Südmark Defence Association. He undertook an extensive programme of lectures dealing above all with the importance of the Teutons, a very positive assessment of Prussia, the cultural superiority of Germans, and the need for closer ties between the two empires. These were all favourite topics from which conclusions can be drawn about the content of his teaching. Like his colleague, Huemer, however, Poetsch was loyal to the Austrian state and its monarchy.⁴⁶ Hitler praised Poetsch warmly in *Mein Kampf* as someone who had been very successful in appealing to his pupils' 'sense of national honour'. In a letter from 1929 he called him a 'teacher, to whom I owe a huge amount, indeed the person who to some extent prepared the foundations for the path that

I have subsequently followed'.⁴⁷ However, significantly, as an Austrian civil servant, Poetsch did not want to be held accountable by his prominent pupil for the latter's radical views and, therefore, in future, distanced himself from him,⁴⁸ whereas Huemer became an enthusiastic Hitler supporter.⁴⁹

In fact, Hitler then conceded in *Mein Kampf* that, while his becoming a 'young revolutionary' and an embittered opponent of the Austrian monarchy had been influenced by Poetsch's teaching, this had probably not been his teacher's intention, at least not to that extent.⁵⁰ This statement, like other remarks in *Mein Kampf*, is quite revealing about the political situation at the Realschule in Linz. Hitler wrote that, in line with the dominant trend in the school, in a very short time he had become a fanatical German Nationalist. Collections for the 'Südmark and the Schulverein' had been held in the school; they had worn cornflowers, the symbol of the Pan-Germans and the German Nationalists. In addition, he and his schoolmates had made no bones about their 'Greater German' views: by displaying the colours black-red-gold, using the 'Heil greeting', and by singing 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles' to the tune of the Kaiser Hymn. These were all actions the school authorities disapproved of.⁵¹ Moreover, the extreme German Nationalist atmosphere of the Realschule in Linz evidently provided fertile soil for more radical examples of 'Greater German' ideology. The pupils apparently enjoyed provoking their teachers with slogans that were frowned on by the imperial authorities, with the excuse that they were only carrying the nationalism that was being preached to them to its logical conclusion.⁵² However, such demonstrations of loyalty to the 'Greater German' cause were not expressions of radical opposition. Rather, they should be seen as expressions of the conventional German Nationalist views that dominated those sections of the middle and lower-middle classes who were not religiously inclined at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1905, after leaving school, Hitler returned from Steyr, which he hated, to Linz, where his mother had moved in June of that year.⁵³ From now onwards, his mother, his younger sister Paula, and his aunt Johanna, who was living with them, spent their lives looking after him in their two-room flat. Reviewing this period, Hitler described it in *Mein Kampf* as 'the happiest days of my life'.⁵⁴ During this time, Hitler does not appear to have had any concrete plans for his further education. He had vague dreams of becoming a great artist and so he spent most of his time drawing, painting, and reading; he briefly took piano lessons,⁵⁵ and in the evenings went to the opera or to concerts.

In 1905, he met August Kubizek at the opera. Kubizek, nine months older than Hitler, worked in his father's upholstery business, shared Hitler's enthusiasm for opera, and was himself a talented pianist. This friend of his youth has provided extensive memoirs of the next two years that Hitler spent in Linz and of the following period when they were together in Vienna. However, the reliability of these memoirs is highly dubious. Kubizek, who remained for the rest of his life an admirer of Hitler, produced an initial version of his memoirs during the Second World War at the behest of the Nazi Party Chancellery, and then expanded them considerably in 1953 incorporating, among other things, excerpts from *Mein Kampf*.

Part II of the original manuscript concerning their period together in Vienna has survived.⁵⁶ The fragment shows very clearly how Kubizek doctored the book version of his memoirs, which appeared in the 1950s and is the most important source for Hitler's youth. Whereas in the original text Kubizek tried to portray Hitler's eccentricity, of which he left the reader in no doubt, as clear proof of his genius, in the book version he dealt with it as a purely private matter and from the perspective of a curious but distant observer. In particular, he significantly revised the passages concerning Hitler's anti-Semitism. Whereas in the original manuscript hatred of the Jews was treated as something quite normal, in the book it appears as if it was a strange obsession of Hitler's. As a former intimate of Hitler, Kubizek had been interned by the Americans and, as a former civil servant, at the beginning of the 1950s he was anxious to rehabilitate himself. He therefore tried to avoid being identified in any way with Hitler. According to the rather innocent message of the book, it was possible to be friendly with Hitler on a purely private basis without sharing his peculiar inclinations or views, let alone recognizing them as harbingers of a later catastrophe. The book, however, shows quite clearly that such a private friendship with Hitler was an illusion, an illusion that Kubizek was still holding on to forty years later.

It is remarkable that, in describing the personal qualities of his young friend in his book, Kubizek sticks to the line already taken in the original manuscript.⁵⁷ He describes the young Hitler as slight and pale, always very simply but correctly dressed; he was well-behaved and, above all, very articulate.⁵⁸ It is clear from Kubizek's account that Hitler dominated this relationship. He decided what the friends were going to do, in the process high-handedly controlling Kubizek's very limited free time. When the two were together, Hitler liked making long-winded speeches about music, art,

architecture, or politics and Kubizek, who considered himself 'basically a quiet and contemplative person', impressed by so much knowledge and eloquence, had simply to listen. According to Kubizek, Hitler had no other friends and did not allow Kubizek to make friends with anybody else.⁵⁹

Kubizek records that, during the four years of this 'friendship', Hitler showed no interest in members of the opposite sex – with one, admittedly very strange, exception. Kubizek mentions a girl named Stefanie, the daughter of a comfortably off widow of a civil servant, with whom Hitler was infatuated, without even once summoning up the courage to speak to her. Hitler told Kubizek that he was deeply in love with Stefanie and he spent much of his time making plans for his future life with his ideal woman. In his fantasies Hitler dreamed that he would become a successful artist, marry his beloved, and live with her in a marvellous villa, which he had already designed down to the last detail.⁶⁰ Kubizek counted himself lucky to have been told of Hitler's love for Stefanie, for 'nothing binds a friendship so closely as a shared secret'.⁶¹ When Hitler fell ill for a lengthy period and later, when he was living in Vienna, Kubizek was obliged to go in place of his friend and stand at a particular spot in the town in order to watch out for Stefanie and then report on his observations.⁶²

Apart from Stefanie, according to Kubizek Hitler was moved by another passion that they shared – the music of Richard Wagner. The friends went to numerous performances of the master at the Linz Landestheater, and their enthusiasm helped them to overlook the inadequacies of provincial productions.⁶³ Wagner's mythical opera world appealed to Hitler's enthusiasm for the German heroic sagas. In this connection Kubizek mentions Gustav Schwab's popular edition of the sagas of the classical world as Hitler's favourite book; his friend had been completely absorbed in it.⁶⁴ This was at the root of Wagner's 'appeal' for him. Kubizek believed that through Hitler's intensive study of Wagner's work and biography it was as if he were trying to incorporate him as 'part of his own being'.⁶⁵

It is clear from Kubizek's memoirs that Hitler spent most of his time immersed in a fantasy world. When Kubizek first visited his friend in the little room he had in his mother's flat, he thought he had 'entered an architect's office'; the whole room was covered with architectural plans and drawings. For apart from heroic sagas and his passion for Wagner, at this time Hitler was preoccupied with comprehensive plans for the reconstruction of the whole of the city of Linz and its surroundings. But he also wrote poems, drew, and painted, and acquired a strong interest in politics and various

contemporary developments.⁶⁶ Kubizek describes the young Hitler as almost entirely focused on himself and his fantasy projects, which he pursued with monomaniacal energy. According to his friend, Hitler's personality was marked by something 'fixed, obdurate, inflexible, stubborn, obsessive, which showed itself to the outside world in the form of an uncanny degree of seriousness'. This was 'the basis on which all his other characteristics developed'.⁶⁷ Kubizek illustrates this trait with the following story: At Hitler's request, the two of them bought a joint lottery ticket and Hitler, absolutely convinced that they would win the main prize, encouraged Kubizek to join him in planning their future lives. They looked for and found a suitable flat, went into all the details of its furnishing, aiming to use it as the centre for a group of cultivated friends, and made plans to go on educational trips together. The household was to be run by a distinguished lady of advanced years, so that, as Kubizek summed up Hitler's thinking, 'no expectations or intentions can arise that might be detrimental to our artistic calling'. Then, when, contrary to Hitler's clear expectations, they failed to win the main prize, he was naturally hugely disappointed.⁶⁸

Vienna

In the spring of 1906 Hitler went on his first trip to Vienna. During his stay of several weeks, he spent most of his time visiting the architectural sights of the city. He went to the city theatre and the Court Opera, where he attended performances of 'Tristan' and the 'Flying Dutchman', both produced by the current director of the Opera, Gustav Mahler.⁶⁹ This Vienna trip made a deep impression on Hitler, reinforcing his desire to become an artist in the metropolis.⁷⁰

More than a year later, in September 1907, he took a decisive step in that direction. He set off for Vienna in order to study at the Academy of Fine Art. He found lodgings in the Mariahilf quarter, at Stumpergasse 31, where he rented a room from a seamstress from Bohemia, Maria Zakreys.⁷¹ Hitler cleared the first hurdle for study at the Academy, admission to a drawing examination lasting several hours, by presenting a set of drawings he had brought with him. But, like three-quarters of the examinees, he completely failed the actual examination. The assessment of the clearly conservative professors read: 'Few heads'. The examiners had evidently disapproved of the fact that Hitler's talent was too one-sidedly focused on drawing buildings

and his ability to depict the human figure was seriously underdeveloped. Hitler had no real interest in people.⁷² This rejection came ‘like a terrible bolt from the blue’ for Hitler, who, according to his own recollection of the incident as described in *Mein Kampf*, was entirely convinced of his own talent. But in *Mein Kampf* he reinterpreted the experience as an opportunity that was to determine his future life. For the rector of the institution had referred to his undoubted architectural talent. ‘In a few days’, he continued, ‘I myself knew that some day I would become an architect’. Although he lacked the requisite school leaving certificate, he was determined to meet the challenge: ‘I wanted to become an architect.’⁷³ In fact, however, he was to apply once again to the Academy’s *painting* class.⁷⁴

But first he returned to Linz. In January 1907, Klara Hitler had had to undergo an operation for breast cancer and her condition worsened in the autumn of 1907. Hitler took over looking after his mother, who, after an agonizing final stage of her cancer, died on 21 December.⁷⁵ The Jewish general practitioner, Eduard Bloch, who treated Klara Hitler – given the state of medical expertise at the time, she was a hopeless case – made an attempt to reduce her pain. In 1941 Bloch, by then living in exile in New York, published a piece in a journal in which he described the powerful emotional impact which the sickness and death of his mother had had on the young Adolf Hitler, but also the devoted care he had given her. ‘In the whole of my practice I have never seen anyone so prostrate with grief as Adolf Hitler.’ Hitler was very grateful for the selfless efforts of the doctor (who, moreover, had charged only a small fee), as is indicated by two post-cards Hitler sent Bloch from Vienna. When, thirty years later, after the Anschluss with Austria, he returned to Linz in triumph, he is said to have made friendly enquiries after Bloch. During the following period Bloch enjoyed a special status in Linz, until he finally succeeded in emigrating in 1940.⁷⁶ Like other Jewish doctors, he had been forced to close his practice, but he was left in peace by the local Nazis and the Gestapo.

Hitler and his younger sister, Paula, most probably divided the cash left by their mother between them. In 1905, after the sale of the Leonding farm, this had amounted to 5,500 Kronen. But some of this was undoubtedly needed to defray part of his mother’s living expenses, and also the costs of her medical treatment and burial. Hitler may have received 1,000 Kronen, a sum that would more or less cover a year’s living expenses. Furthermore, he and his sister successfully applied for an orphans’ pension, which provided them with a monthly income of 50 Kronen until the age of 24 and which

they shared between them. However, the precondition was that they were both unprovided for. This applied to Hitler for as long he continued his education, or at least gave the impression in Linz that he was doing so.⁷⁷

After he had disposed of his mother's effects, in February 1908 Hitler returned to Vienna, where he once again took up lodgings in Stumpergasse 31. A former neighbour of his mother's from her days in Linz had arranged an interview for him, via a Vienna friend of hers, with Alfred Roller, the famous set designer of the Vienna Opera, whose work Hitler admired. But, in the end, the shy young man lacked the courage to take up the opportunity, as he told Roller on meeting him decades later.⁷⁸

A short time after Hitler's arrival in the capital his friend Kubizek, whom he had persuaded to study music at the Vienna Conservatoire, followed him there. He had even succeeded in persuading his friend's parents to agree to this.⁷⁹ For details of the following months that Hitler and Kubizek spent together in Vienna we have, in addition to Kubizek's book, the original, much shorter, text he prepared for the Party Chancellery prior to 1945.

In his book Kubizek recalled how Hitler had waited for him impatiently at the station: 'In his dark, good quality overcoat, dark hat, and with his walking stick with an ivory handle, he appeared almost elegant. He was obviously pleased to see me, greeted me warmly and, as was then the custom, kissed me lightly on the cheek'.⁸⁰ Evidently in order to prevent speculation about his friendship, Kubizek had slightly altered the original text, which read: 'My friend... greeted me with joyous enthusiasm with a kiss and then took me straight to his lodgings.' Kubizek then goes on to describe in his book how they both succeeded in persuading Hitler's landlady to exchange his room for the sitting room, which the two of them now shared. Kubizek was accepted by the Vienna Conservatoire and borrowed a piano, which he managed with some difficulty to fit into the small room.⁸¹

In the meantime, Hitler continued with what he had enjoyed doing in Linz: reading a fair amount, drawing, and developing his architectural plans. Soon he started preparing comprehensive plans for the remodelling of the Austrian capital. In fact, it is evident that Hitler's architectural knowledge and preferences were very strongly influenced by Vienna models, in particular the prestige architecture of the Ringstrasse.⁸² According to Kubizek, Hitler also attempted to write a play and an opera,⁸³ both of which were based in the world of Germanic heroes, but without success. Kubizek reports that, during this period, Hitler concocted all sorts of fantastic projects, particularly after his mental balance had been upset by the death of his

mother and his rejection by the Academy. He tortured himself with recriminations, which, however, could suddenly turn into tirades aimed at the 'whole of humanity', who 'did not understand him, did not respect him and by whom he felt persecuted and cheated'.⁸⁴

Kubizek claimed that Hitler had delayed telling him about his rejection by the Academy, saying that he had not informed his mother because of her illness.⁸⁵ However, he had in fact told his mother's landlady in Linz in February 1908,⁸⁶ and it is clear from Kubizek's original text that the latter knew about it before arriving in Vienna. Thus, the idea that Hitler made a secret of his rejection by the Academy is a piece of fiction by Kubizek from the 1950s designed to explain Hitler's eccentric traits as a response to a major disappointment.

In fact, Hitler used his stay in Vienna in order to prepare for a further attempt to get into the Academy in autumn 1908, at least that is how he is likely to have viewed it. Kubizek's report reflects the contradictory impressions that the capital city, Vienna, made on the two young men from the provinces. On the one hand, they enjoyed the privilege of living in one of the most brilliant cultural metropolises in Europe. The two friends visited the Vienna theatre and the musical venues, particularly the Court Opera, and Kubizek noted 'their undivided love and enthusiasm for the music dramas of Richard Wagner'. For Hitler a Wagner opera was not simply a visit to a cultural event, but 'the opportunity of being transported into that extraordinary state which Wagner's music produced in him, that trance, that drifting into a mystical dream-world which he needed in order to cope with the enormous tension of his turbulent nature'. In Vienna it was possible to see almost all of Wagner's operas; Hitler had certainly seen his favourite opera, 'Lohengrin', at least ten times.⁸⁷

On the other hand, it was only too obvious that all this prestige architecture and high culture was in striking contrast to the reality of life for most people in the city. The stark social differences and the misery of the masses – the two young men were living on the borderline of poverty – the movements of social protest that were emerging among the working class and also among the lower-middle class, who were fearing social decline, were all too apparent. Moreover, in a multi-ethnic city like Vienna the monarchy's nationality conflicts were omnipresent.⁸⁸ In three places in the book Kubizek claims that Hitler was anti-Semitic: Hitler disliked going to the Mensa [student cafeteria] because it was also frequented by Jews; he was annoyed by an encounter with a begging Jewish peddler; and he had signed

both of them up as members of the 'Anti-Semitic League' [Antisemitenbund], although this association did not in fact exist in Austria before the First World War. In the original manuscript this last reference and the one about the peddler do not occur, whereas Hitler's anger about the Jewish visitors to the Mensa receives much more space, and there is also a lengthy section about Hitler's negative opinion of Jewish visitors to the opera, which does not appear in the book. However, Kubizek notes in both versions of his memoirs that, despite his anti-Semitic views, Hitler defended Mahler's Wagner productions, which at the time were subject to anti-Semitic attacks.⁸⁹

Kubizek was convinced that, during their time together in Vienna, despite being 18–19 years old, Hitler had not had a relationship with a girl or a woman. Although members of the opposite sex often showed interest in his friend, he had ignored them and, what is more, had refused to allow Kubizek to have a love affair. In general, Hitler had been decidedly hostile to women.⁹⁰ Yet, despite his prudishness and rejection of sex, and, according to Kubizek, this included homosexuality, at the same time Hitler was fascinated by sexual topics. In the course of long nocturnal conversations he had expatiated on the 'flame of life' and, accompanied by Kubizek, had paid an extensive visit to a Vienna red-light district.⁹¹

In the summer of 1908, at the end of term, Kubizek went back to Linz, assuming that he would once again be sharing accommodation with Hitler in the Stumpergasse when he returned to Vienna in the autumn. His friend wrote him a few letters during the summer, but when Kubizek returned to Vienna in November Hitler had moved out without leaving an address.⁹²

In the meantime, Hitler had moved to lodgings in Felberstrasse 22, near the Westbahnhof railway station and had failed in his second attempt to gain admission to the Academy of Fine Art, this time without even being short-listed for the examination.⁹³ It is plausible to assume that this final blow to his future study plans hit Hitler much harder than his initial rejection. Then he had been able to maintain the illusion that he could correct the flaws in his work by practice; but now it was clear that, in the eyes of the Academy professors, he was simply not suited to be an artist.

According to Kubizek, Hitler had already been unstable and irascible when he was living in Linz;⁹⁴ he had suffered periodically from depression and spent whole days and nights wandering the streets.⁹⁵ It is clear from Kubizek's report that Hitler regarded his friend above all as a patient audience and admirer to whom he could outline all his grandiose pipe dreams.

He evidently exploited the relationship one-sidedly to his own advantage, protecting it jealously against outside interference; he did not even bother to seek out other friends. His infatuation for Stefanie had only served as the key to a dream world in which the young woman merely functioned as an accessory to a career as a successful artist. Hitler only acquired an interest in other people when he could fit them into his fantasy world – even if Kubizek, who could never escape from the spell of this ‘friendship’, continued to maintain, decades later, that Hitler had been a good and true friend, who had always been considerate towards him, respecting his feelings and needs.⁹⁶

Hitler’s grand ideas about his future invariably envisaged his playing roles in which he would be admired and celebrated. The almost manic efforts which Hitler put into his plans to reconstruct first Linz and then Vienna – his later places of residence, Munich and Berlin, would also be subjected to his mania for reconstruction – demonstrate an extreme determination completely to reshape his immediate surroundings in accordance with his ideas. But all this, the eccentric plans and roles, was not just playing around; it formed the actual content of his life. At the turn of the century, Hitler was admittedly by no means alone in his flight from reality, his conviction that he was basically an unrecognized genius and must now pursue his own path as an artist, a future that was preordained by his exceptional talent. Youthful escapism as a reaction to a society that set strict limits for young people was a favourite trope of contemporary literature: ‘the artist’s life’ versus the complacent world of the bourgeoisie. Above all, his favourite composer, Wagner, evidently provided him with the appropriate role model for the unrecognized genius.⁹⁷

Kubizek perfectly summed up Hitler’s tendency to compensate for the deficiencies of his private life by creating a huge ‘public self’: ‘He made up for the complete insignificance of his own life by making categorical statements on all public issues. His desire to alter the status quo thereby acquired a sense of direction and a goal.’ What is also clear from Kubizek’s report, however, is that Hitler had become so caught up in his fantasies that he could no longer tolerate disappointments, the simple confrontation with reality. The only thing that helped Hitler in such situations was to indulge in monologues for hours at a time, to which Kubizek had patiently listened and during which Hitler was once again able to revive his vulnerable dream world and in an even more grandiose fashion.

However, the rejection of his second application to the Academy of Fine Art had damaged his self-image to such an extent and was so intolerable

that this time his only way out was to do something drastic. He did not mention this at all in *Mein Kampf*; instead, he tried to create the impression that, after the death of his mother, he was preparing to be trained as an architect, which, as we know, was untrue. In fact, he had tried once more to be admitted to the Academy's painting class.⁹⁸ Now he not only broke off all contact with Kubizek but also with his relatives, presumably because he was ashamed of his failure.⁹⁹ Moreover, he wished to conceal from his sister the fact that, after his plan to study had proved abortive, he was no longer entitled to draw half the orphans' pension they had been granted jointly. His second rejection produced an even more intensive flight into megalomaniacal plans, which were so monomaniacal that Hitler could no longer envisage any alternative form of education or future career. As a result, he experienced a rapid decline in his social status. He lived in the Felberstrasse until August 1909 and then moved for a few weeks to Sechshauserstrasse 58. Although, in the summer of 1908, he had secured a loan of 924 Kronen from his aunt,¹⁰⁰ a year later these not inconsiderable financial reserves had been used up and he could no longer afford a room or a regular place to sleep. At any rate, no address for him can be found; his tracks were lost in the metropolis; he may have spent the night in the open or in a café.¹⁰¹ Hitler himself provided an extensive description of his miserable existence in Vienna during this period in *Mein Kampf*, but stayed silent about the details of his life at this time.¹⁰² This remained the case throughout his life, although occasionally he referred to casual labour 'on building sites' or claimed to have studied art history or related subjects.¹⁰³

We do, however, have a detailed report that provides some information about Hitler's life between autumn 1909 and the summer of 1910. It comes from Reinhold Hanisch and appeared in 1939 (two years after Hanisch's death) in the American journal *New Republic*; the publication was based on Hanisch's own written account of his encounter with Hitler, which is also available as a document in the NSDAP-Hauptarchiv.¹⁰⁴ Hanisch was a rather dubious figure. In the early 1930s he made his living from the sale of forged Hitler 'originals', and by providing journalists hostile to Hitler with revelations about the man who in the meantime had become a prominent figure. Nevertheless, his report appears entirely plausible. His descriptions of Hitler's lifestyle tally in many respects with Kubizek's memoirs and in some cases can be verified from other sources.

In 1909 Hanisch was living as a city tramp in Vienna. According to his account, during the autumn of that year he had encountered Hitler in the

Meidlinger hostel for the homeless in the next bed. Down at heel, hungry, and without any money, Hitler joined up with Hanisch and the two of them got through the next fortnight together. In the evenings they attempted to get beds in the various hostels; during the day, they tried to find casual work. In the process it became clear that Hitler was either too weak or too inept for most of the work on offer. Hanisch persuaded Hitler, who had evidently mentioned attending an art academy, to enter a business partnership. Hitler would paint picture postcards, which Hanisch would then sell. The project proved successful and soon the two of them had enough money for a permanent base: the men's hostel in the Brigittenau district, in which Hitler was to stay between February 1910 and May 1913. This men's hostel was a superior form of charitable institution and, by contemporary standards, a model of its kind. It was intended, in the first instance, for single workers on a low income, who were able to stay there for lengthy periods, being well and cheaply looked after. There were no mass dormitories, but instead individual cubicles; the sanitary facilities were adequate and there was a reading room.¹⁰⁵

This is where Hitler sat during the day painting his postcards, which were copies of pictures of famous Viennese buildings and intended for tourists. They were produced as a cheap series, but soon Hitler quarrelled with Hanisch, who kept demanding more pictures. Hanisch reported that Hitler's productivity suffered because he preferred to read the newspapers and have discussions with the other visitors to the reading room. According to Hanisch, Hitler's anger was mainly directed at the Catholic Church and the Jesuits. He spoke very approvingly of the Pan-German leader, Georg von Schönerer, and of Karl Hermann Wolf, the dominant figure among the German Radicals, but also of the mayor of Vienna, Karl Lueger.

According to Hanisch's memoirs, Hitler discussed the issue of anti-Semitism at length, generally criticizing anti-Semitic positions; indeed, apparently he made positive comments about the Jews. Hanisch reported that there were Jews among Hitler's closest acquaintances at the hostel and with one of them Hitler had a close relationship. This man has been verified through the files of the registration office: Josef Neumann, born in 1878, a copper polisher, of the Mosaic religion. Neumann and another Jewish peddler (his name is also in the files) now began selling Hitler's pictures, leading to a quarrel with Hanisch.¹⁰⁶ Hanisch even maintains that, after receiving a substantial sum for a big order, Hitler disappeared from the hostel with Neumann and went to stay in a hotel for a week. There is in fact evidence

that in June 1910 Hitler deregistered from the hostel for ten days. It is not clear what he did with Neumann during this period; he told Hanisch they had been sightseeing.¹⁰⁷

Shortly afterwards, the quarrel with Hanisch escalated: A postcard seller accused Hanisch of stealing a picture painted by Hitler. Hitler was interviewed by the police – the report has survived – and confirmed the accusation. Hanisch, who had registered with the police under a false name, was kept in custody for seven days.¹⁰⁸ After the break with Hanisch – Neumann left Vienna in July 1910 – Hitler now sold his pictures himself, in particular to two Jewish picture-framers, Jacob Altenberg and Samuel Morgenstern.¹⁰⁹

While Hanisch's report can be verified in part through official documents, other sources are much more dubious.¹¹⁰ Indeed, there is hardly any reliable information about Hitler's life for the period 1910 to 1913. One thing, however, is clear from the official documents: When his Aunt Johanna died in 1911 it emerged that Hitler had received payments from her, in particular the loan in 1908 of 924 Kronen. Hitler was now compelled to admit in a declaration to the district court in Vienna-Leopoldstadt that he was not an art student without an income, but easily in a position to support himself; the orphans' pension was thus assigned solely to his sister, Paula. This admission that he had been deceiving his sister for years, which also involved admitting that his plan to study had failed, was probably the reason why, having already broken off contact in 1908, he continued to avoid her. He only saw Paula again at the beginning of the 1920s, after he had begun his political career and could regard himself as a success. He seems to have had occasional contact with his half-sister, Angela.¹¹¹

There is a further report from a fellow occupant of the men's hostel covering 1913. It was by Karl Honisch and written in 1939 at the request of the Nazi Party archive. Honisch, born in Moravia in 1891 and a clerk by profession, was evidently anxious in 1939 to write a harmless report that would not conflict with the official Hitler story. It is clear from Honisch's account that Hitler had basically maintained his customary way of life. He spent a large part of his time in the reading room working on his pictures. Honisch describes him as someone of 'slight build, with hollow cheeks and a shock of dark hair flopping over his forehead, wearing a shabby suit'. He had noticed Hitler's 'invariably steady, extremely regular way of life'. He had been subject to mood swings: on most occasions he was friendly and relaxed, but from time to time he had been withdrawn and been something of a dreamer; sometimes he had been irascible. According to Honisch, Hitler had

had a fixed plan to go to Munich to attend the Academy of Art. He took an active part in the political discussions that frequently occurred in the reading room among his regular circle of 'intellectuals', becoming particularly engaged when 'the Reds' or the 'Jesuits' were being attacked.¹¹²

That poses the question: What were Hitler's political views during his time in Vienna? His assertion in *Mein Kampf* that, during his Vienna years, he had become a strong supporter of Schönerer and his Pan-Germans is entirely plausible. Given the strongly German Nationalist milieu in Linz in which he had grown up, he may well have already been attracted by the more radical Pan-Germans.¹¹³ In her dissertation on Hitler's image of Austria, written in the 1960s, Eleonore Kandl systematically collated Hitler's comments on the old Austrian empire contained in *Mein Kampf*, his Table Talk and other sources, carefully comparing them with relevant articles in the Vienna press during the years he spent in the capital. The result is clear: on every essential point Hitler had adopted Pan-German propaganda to an amazing extent, even using the same terminology. This involved in particular:

- the conviction that the Habsburg monarchy was in its death throes, as the political elite, with its 'feeble' politics bent on compromise, was not in a position to maintain the dominance of German-speakers over the multi-ethnic mishmash;¹¹⁴
- accusations that the Habsburg monarchy had repeatedly betrayed the interests of the German nation and had encouraged the 'Slavization' of the empire;¹¹⁵
- references to the threat of 'Slavization' and the allegedly fateful role of the Church in this process;¹¹⁶
- his rejection of Social Democracy as a force that was nationally unreliable;¹¹⁷
- the enumeration of fatal mistakes made by the monarchy and the government that had served to 'weaken' the German-speakers;¹¹⁸
- his furious tirades against parliamentary democracy;¹¹⁹
- his demand for a close alliance with Germany because of their common 'blood';¹²⁰
- complaints about the ethnic mixing in the Austrian army;¹²¹
- his criticism of the 'Jewified' press in the Austrian capital;¹²²
- his deep distrust of Vienna, indeed his hatred of this 'racial Babylon', and of 'all this ethnic mishmash' in the capital as the embodiment of 'racial disgrace'.¹²³

The extent of agreement between the two is so great that Hitler must have totally absorbed these polemics during his stay in Vienna.

However, when Hitler arrived in Vienna in 1908 the Pan-Germans had long passed the high point of their political influence. While during the 1880s and 1890s Schönerer's political ideas had been seriously considered as a possible option for the reorganization of the Habsburg Empire, his movement was now regarded as merely a political sect. In the election of 1907 his group of twenty-one deputies was reduced to three, albeit very vociferous ones; he himself was not elected. His aggressive behaviour and extreme politics had turned him into a caricature, although Hitler would have observed the cult his supporters still made of him.¹²⁴ He praised Schönerer's assessment of the situation in the Habsburg monarchy in *Mein Kampf*, supporting Schönerer's main demand for the Anschluss of German Austria with the German Reich, but strongly criticizing him as a politician. Schönerer had lacked clear ideas about the 'importance of the social problem', had allowed himself to become involved in parliamentary politics, and had carried on a completely pointless struggle against the Church.¹²⁵

Hitler noted in *Mein Kampf* that, having originally been a keen Schönerer supporter, in the course of his stay in Vienna he had more and more come to admire its mayor, Karl Lueger, and his policies.¹²⁶ While he was at odds with Lueger's Christian Social ideology, Hitler considered him a political genius on account of his pragmatism and realism and indeed 'the greatest German mayor of all time'. He had had 'a rare knowledge of people' and had developed 'an exceptionally clever relationship with the Catholic Church'.¹²⁷ Lueger, who held the office of mayor between 1907 and 1910, had, through major local government projects, not only contributed to turning this city of two million people into a viable, modern metropolis, but had also established an extremely popular autocratic regime. This regime was based not least on consistently applied anti-Semitic demagoguery, in which 'the Jews' were made responsible for simply anything and everything.¹²⁸

Hitler's two political models, Lueger and Schönerer, both used crude political rhetoric. It would, therefore, seem logical to describe them as his anti-Semitic mentors. However, in *Mein Kampf* he adopted another approach, portraying his development into a radical anti-Semite as the result of personal experiences and as his 'most difficult transformation', lasting more than two years and a phase of 'bitter internal struggle'.¹²⁹ Although this reappraisal had been initiated by his admiration for Lueger and his Christian

Social Party, Hitler made it absolutely clear that Christian-motivated anti-Semitism of this kind was a 'pseudo anti-Semitism' and, as it was not based on 'racial theory', had not grasped the core of the problem.¹³⁰ Describing how he came to rethink the issue, he wrote that his first experience was when he took offence at the appearance of orthodox Jews on the streets of Vienna: their foreignness, their strangeness led him to conclude that the Jews were a separate people. He had then looked into the question of Zionism, but had soon realized that the debates between Zionist Jews and liberal Jews were phony disagreements that only diverted attention from the real sense of solidarity that existed among Jews.

He had been disgusted by their (alleged) dirtiness – physical, but above all moral: 'was there any form of filth or shamelessness, above all in cultural life, that did not involve at least one Jew?'¹³¹ In particular, he deplored the disastrous role played by Jews in the press, art, literature, and the theatre; he also blamed them for organizing prostitution and the white slave trade. Finally, he claimed to have got to the heart of the problem when he noticed that the whole of the Social Democratic leadership was in the hands of Jews. All these 'insights' produced an apocalyptic vision: 'If the Jew with his Marxist creed' proved victorious over the other nations of the world 'his crown' would be 'the dance of death of the human race'.¹³²

This putative 'conversion' to anti-Semitism as the result of his own observations, reading, and reflexion is, however, contradicted by the reports of the witnesses, quoted above, which show that Hitler was certainly not a keen anti-Semite and describe various personal relationships he had with Jews. How can this contradiction be resolved?

When dealing with the question of Hitler's political views during his Vienna years, it is essential to ignore the hugely influential self-image Hitler cultivated in *Mein Kampf*. This was of someone predestined for an exceptional career, systematically working out his own ideology, and preparing for his extraordinary future role through a kind of course of personal study. Nothing could be more misleading. In fact, at the time, Hitler was a nobody struggling to survive day by day, who from time to time sounded off about politics, coping with his frustrations by believing that the Vienna that was treating him so badly was the capital of an empire that was doomed to destruction. His apathy and inability to liberate himself from his situation on the margins of society are remarkable when compared with the energy he unleashed from 1919 onwards. As we shall see, it was only in the particular post-war situation and in the context of revolution and counter-revolution

in Bavaria, in other words very largely as a result of external circumstances, that Hitler was effectively catapulted into a political career.

Thus to pose the question of whether or not Hitler acquired his radical anti-Semitism in Vienna, or rather how far his Vienna years laid the foundations for his further 'career' as an anti-Semite is to approach the problem from the wrong angle. Anti-Semitism basically represents a distorted awareness of social reality; it provides pseudo-explanations for complex phenomena. Anti-Semitism must always be seen and interpreted within the context of the prevailing political and social ideas; its 'arguments' are, depending on the context, almost completely interchangeable. As a supporter of Schönerer's ideology, Hitler considered that he was confronted with a veritable phalanx of enemies: the monarchy, the state apparatus, the nobility, parliament, the Catholic Church, Slavs, Jews, as well as the Marxist workers' movement. All, in his view, formed a fateful coalition, whose efforts were bent on humiliating the German-speakers in the Habsburg empire. Seen in this light, his anti-Semitism referred to one enemy among a number of 'antis'. In a city in which anti-Semitism was a fixture of everyday life and formed the basis of the popular city government, and with his anti-Semitism 'bracketed' by many other enemies, Hitler was in no way remarkable. What was really radical about his ideology at the time was not his anti-Semitism but his rejection of the current political order, based as it was on numerous imagined enemies.

Apart from the ever-present anti-Semitism, during his stay in the Austrian capital Hitler is likely to have come into contact with all sorts of ethnic and racist ideas via Pan-German journalism. Notions such as that of a superior Nordic race, the racial inferiority of Jews, 'Negroes', and Asiatics, and ideas of racial breeding and of the need to maintain racial purity to prevent degeneracy were fairly widespread in Vienna, particularly during the pre-war years. But the notion that, during his Vienna years, he had already had one or more ideological 'mentors' from the racist-esoteric scene cannot be proved any more than can the thesis, put forward in the first instance by Hitler himself, that he had distilled a fully-formed world view from the existing concoction of ethnic nationalist (*völkisch*) and anti-Semitic ideas.¹³³

Munich

In May 1913 Hitler turned his back on Vienna. Together with a certain Rudolf Häusler, an acquaintance from the men's hostel in Meldemannstrasse,

he moved to Munich, where he basically resumed his old life-style. During the first months, he tried to live as best he could from his paintings. Apart from that, he pursued his various 'studies', without apparently having tried to acquire any formal education or regular work. During this period, apart from Häusler, with whom he shared lodgings for a time at Schleissheimer Strasse 43, a boarding house belonging to a widow, Anna Popp, he does not appear to have had any close acquaintances, let alone friends, and was considered by those who knew him to be very much a loner.¹³⁴

Anton Joachimsthaler has collected various documents from which it is clear that Hitler wandered through the centre of Munich selling his pictures, mainly water colours of historical buildings, in bars or to shops. He evidently tried to play the sympathy card: his customers saw in this rather shabby young man an impecunious student or an unemployed artist. Some even placed orders with him.¹³⁵ As far as officialdom was concerned, he called himself an artist. In later years he repeatedly claimed that he had maintained his interest in politics during his Munich years, not so much by attending meetings as by intensive reading. He had allegedly concentrated in particular on 'Marxism' and anti-Semitism, thereby providing 'positively granite foundations' for his political views.¹³⁶ There are good reasons for regarding this account of his 'personal study' as a further addition to the legend that Hitler was constructing around himself; at any rate, there is no evidence that he ever became politically engaged.¹³⁷

What prompted Hitler to move to Munich? There were probably several reasons for this decision.

On reaching 24 years of age he could claim his inheritance from his father, and the sum of 700 Kronen, on which he could easily live for a year, enabled him to move. His dislike of Vienna after five 'years of suffering' was obvious, whereas Munich as a 'city of culture' offered him the opportunity of continuing his bohemian existence in new surroundings. The pre-war years in Munich, he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, were 'the happiest and by far the most contented of my life', not least because he had felt Munich to be a 'German city', to which he had been bound by 'heartfelt love'.¹³⁸ Because he had felt so happy on the banks of the Isar, in *Mein Kampf* he put back the start of his stay by a year and claimed that he had already moved to Munich in 1912.

In his Table Talk in October 1941 Hitler gave a further reason for his move: he had thought of attending an architectural academy in Germany, for which

an advanced school certificate was not required, as was the case in Austria. But then, once in Munich, he had decided to do three more years of 'practical training' before applying to become a draughtsman at the leading construction firm of Heilmann & Littmann. Evidently, he had planned to use this position as a springboard for a future career as an architect.¹³⁹

In addition, he had a further, very practical motive for quitting Austria. In 1909, at the age of twenty, Hitler should have registered with the army recruitment authorities and then a year later been called up. This he had failed to do, nor had he done so subsequently. To move abroad without having registered for military service was a serious offence. Moreover, it was exacerbated by the fact that, on leaving Vienna, he had not given Munich as his future place of residence, thereby indicating that he wanted to cover his tracks from the Austrian authorities. From August 1913 onwards, Hitler was being sought by the Linz police for 'avoiding call-up', and in January 1914 he was located, thanks to the cooperation of the Munich police and brought before the Austrian Consulate-General in Munich. His excuse that he had registered as a potential conscript in 1910 in Vienna and had had no intention of avoiding military service was accepted, as it was impossible to disprove it in Munich. He was permitted to undergo his medical in Salzburg on 5 February 1914, where he was declared 'unfit for military service'.¹⁴⁰ Six months later, the First World War broke out.

World war

The response to Germany's declaration of war in the summer of 1914 within Germany itself was mixed: on the one hand, enthusiastic approval, on the other open discontent and protest, and in between, much nervousness, apprehension, and anxiety. The 'August experience', that spontaneous wave of nationalist enthusiasm that had allegedly united the nation (an idea that played such a large role in the press reports of the time and in the memories of nationalistic Germans) is a very one-sided portrayal of the national mood of the time and one subsequently spread by the authorities.

In fact, it was only certain sections of the Munich population who greeted the threat of war at the end of July 1914 with patriotic enthusiasm.¹⁴¹ When Germany mobilized and declared war on Russia on the evening of 1 August, there was a spontaneous demonstration in the city centre; a few thousand people surged to the Wittelsbach palace and paid homage to

the king. The following day a crowd assembled at 12 o'clock, when there was a changing of the guard in front of the palace, in order to express their patriotism, among other things by singing patriotic songs. There is a photograph of the scene, taken by Hitler's subsequent personal photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, in which Hitler can be identified, albeit not wholly reliably, being swept up in the enthusiasm. However, Hoffmann's photograph is not so much a document of the actual popular mood as part of a patriotic propaganda campaign: the photographer pressed the button just at the point when the crowd, which filled only part of the Odeonsplatz, was being filmed by a film camera at the edge of the square and when it was expressing its enthusiasm in a particularly visible way.¹⁴²

The outbreak of war jolted Hitler out of his apathy. For him, he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, 'those hours seemed like a release from the most painful feelings of my youth'.¹⁴³ In the confusion of the first phase of mobilization he succeeded in being taken on as a volunteer by the 2nd Infantry Regiment. The fact that he was an Austrian citizen and therefore not really eligible to serve in the Bavarian army was ignored; his only recently having been declared unfit for service was also evidently deemed irrelevant. On 16 August, he joined the regiment and on 1 September was assigned to the recently formed 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment.¹⁴⁴

In the army, Hitler for the first time in his life found himself subject to a regime of rules, accepted as a member of a group (albeit in the role of an outsider), and acquiring a purpose in life. In one of his Table Talks in October 1941 he described the almost five years he spent in the army as the 'only time' in his life when he had 'no worries'.¹⁴⁵ From his point of view, as a soldier he had for the first time the chance of carrying out a concrete and purposeful task that matched his high-flown fantasies: he was absolutely convinced that the war would produce a victorious 'Greater Germany'.

Contrary to the long-standing legend, the 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment was not a regiment of volunteers; only 30 per cent of the soldiers who joined in 1914 did so voluntarily. The majority of the members of the regiment consisted of 'Ersatz-Reservists', in other words men who had hitherto been excused national service.¹⁴⁶ The social composition of the regiment was similar to that of the Bavarian population as a whole.¹⁴⁷ On 10 October, after being inspected by King Ludwig III of Bavaria, the regiment moved into Lechfeld camp where it underwent a ten-day course of fairly intensive training that almost exhausted a large number of its members. The first five days at Lechfeld, Hitler wrote to his former landlady, Frau

Popp, 'were the most taxing of my life'.¹⁴⁸ On 21 October, the regiment was transferred to the western front; according to Hitler, during their journey through the Reich, the troop trains were enthusiastically greeted by the population.¹⁴⁹ On 24 October, the infantrymen arrived in Lille, from where, after a few days, they were marched to the front.¹⁵⁰

On 29 October, the regiment had its first experience of combat. As part of the so-called First Battle of Flanders, which had begun on 20 October, an attack group was created from the German 6th Army, with the aim of supporting the offensive of the 4th Army further north, along the Channel coast. The 6th Bavarian Reserve Division including Hitler's regiment, which was commonly called the List regiment after the name of its first commander, formed part of this attack group. On the morning of 29 October, the regiment had the task of taking the village of Gheluvelt, held by troops of the British IV Corps. The inexperienced, inadequately trained, and poorly equipped soldiers from Bavaria – for example, they had not received any helmets, but wore territorial army caps – found themselves confronted by well-trained units made up of professional soldiers, although during the three-day engagement the latter made numerous tactical errors.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the List regiment not only had to fight the British; numerous losses were caused by friendly fire because the members of the List regiment were thought to be British on account of their unusual head gear.¹⁵²

Hitler's own account and the reports of other members of the regiment provide a striking picture of the fearful chaos of this 'baptism of fire'. The attack took place on broken ground with numerous obstacles: hedges, fences, and ditches held up the advance, while farmsteads, copses, and spinneys provided the enemy with sufficient cover to mount ambushes. Governed no doubt by a mixture of fear and desperate courage, the inexperienced troops, who had not yet felt the effects of artillery and machine-gun fire, pressed forwards; the attack then broke up into a series of uncoordinated bands, who were continually pushed to go on by their officers and NCOs. Three months later, using his unique orthography, Hitler described this experience in a detailed letter to a Munich acquaintance, a lawyer, Ernst Hepp,¹⁵³ as if it had only just happened. Even by February 1915 Hitler had evidently still not got over his experiences during the previous autumn.

'We creep along the ground until we reach the edge of the forest. Shells scream and whistle overhead, tree trunks and branches are flying all around us. Then once again shells crash into the edge of the wood sending up clouds of stones, earth and sand, uprooting the biggest trees and suffocating

everything in a yellow-grey stinking mist. . . . Then, our major arrives. He goes on ahead. I jump up and run as fast as I can over meadows and turnip fields, over ditches, climb over wire and hedges and then, in front of me, I hear shouts: "In here, everybody, in here." I see a long trench in front of me; a moment later I jump in, as do a large number of others, in front of me, behind me, to the left and right. Beside me there are Würt[t]embergers, under me dead and wounded Britons.' After their own artillery had begun targeting the British lines, the attack continued: 'We advance rapidly across the fields and, after, in some cases bloody, hand-to-hand combat, we kick the chaps out of their trenches one after the other. Many put their hands up. Those who don't surrender are killed. We clear them out trench by trench.' But finally the attack stalled until the battalion commander intervened: 'The major quickly reviews the situation and orders us to prepare to attack to the right and left of the road. We have no more officers left and hardly any NCOs. So those of us who are a bit plucky go back to get reinforcements. When I return a second time with a troop of Würt[t]embergers who had become separated from their units the major is lying on the ground with his chest split open and surrounded by a pile of bodies. Now there is one officer left, his adjutant. We are boiling with rage. Everybody shouts: "Lieutenant, take the lead and let's attack!" So, on we go through the forest to the left; we can't get through on the road. Four times we press forward and each time have to go back again; from my whole lot there is only one left apart from me, and in the end he too falls. A bullet has torn off the whole of the right arm of my coat, but miraculously I am unharmed and OK. Finally at two o'clock we make a fifth attempt and this time we manage to take the edge of the forest and the farmstead.'¹⁵⁴

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler describes how the attacking soldiers had sung 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles', and how this had spread from company to company.¹⁵⁵ His own report of the battle, composed much closer to the events, does not contain this incident and nor do the other contemporary reports of this attack. Evidently Hitler took the liberty of borrowing from the numerous post-war descriptions of the patriotic courage of those 'volunteer regiments' who, based near Langemarck (a good ten kilometres north of Gheluvelt), had been cut down by British machine guns while singing 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'.¹⁵⁶

After three days of bitter fighting the regiment finally succeeded in taking the village, but they did not secure the real goal of the offensive, namely the capture of the city of Ypres. Around 75 per cent of the reserve regiment

had been killed or wounded. Among the dead was its commander, Julius List.¹⁵⁷ The offensive became bogged down in trench warfare and little changed in this respect during the following four years.¹⁵⁸ To begin with, however, after a short break for rest and recuperation, in November the regiment was integrated into the front running through Flanders, initially near Messines,¹⁵⁹ then a few days later, near Wytschaete,¹⁶⁰ where it took part in more heavy fighting, and then again near Messines.¹⁶¹

After the war had come to a halt, the soldiers directly on the front line inevitably had to dig themselves in using a system of trenches and dugouts. With the onset of winter, fighting on this part of the front gradually died down, even though casualties still occurred through artillery salvos, enemy snipers, and occasional British reconnaissance sorties.¹⁶²

During the winter it was above all the unpleasant conditions in the trenches that made the soldiers' lives a misery. 'As a result of the endless rain (we don't have any winter), the proximity to the sea and the low-lying land, the meadows and fields are like bottomless marshes, while the roads are covered with mud a foot deep. And our trenches run through this bog', Hitler wrote to Munich.¹⁶³ The soldiers often stood up to their knees in water, trenches had to be abandoned because they had been transformed into streams. Maintaining even a minimum of hygiene under these conditions was impossible.¹⁶⁴

On 3 November, Hitler was promoted to the rank of corporal and, on 9 November, assigned to the staff of the regiment as a runner.¹⁶⁵ In this capacity his job was primarily to take messages from regimental headquarters several kilometres behind the front line to the forward battalion headquarters or to neighbouring regiments, but generally not to the front line itself.¹⁶⁶ In the event that their own positions were under heavy attack this was a dangerous job; most of the time, however, there was relative peace on the front line and the advantages of being a runner predominated. Unlike his regimental comrades, Hitler did not have to spend days and nights in the bog and dirt of the trenches; most of his time was passed on standby in the (forward) headquarters of the regiment or in the relatively secure regimental headquarters further in the rear, where he had fairly comfortable sleeping quarters, and one can assume that his constant proximity to staff officers would have provided certain privileges. In quiet periods he could read, draw, and paint; he even kept a little dog called Foxl. While around a quarter of the soldiers of the List regiment, which was continually being replenished, were killed, none of the eight members of Hitler's group of runners, who

were with him from 1915 onwards, were killed during their military service.¹⁶⁷ Hitler did everything he could to hang on to his posting.¹⁶⁸

According to Fritz Wiedemann, who was the regimental adjutant at the time, Hitler was considered particularly reliable. Thus, along with two or three other comrades, he was used as little as possible for conveying routine messages, and kept back for especially difficult assignments. From a military standpoint, however, Hitler had not cut 'a particularly impressive figure': his bearing was sloppy, his head 'usually tilted towards his left shoulder'. His responses were 'anything but soldierly and brief'; he did not have 'what it takes to be in command of others', but nor had he sought promotion. After the Second World War, Max Amann, Hitler's sergeant-major and later head of the German press, stated that Hitler had been 'quite appalled' when offered promotion. Amann described Hitler as 'obedient, zealous in the performance of his duties, and modest'.¹⁶⁹

On 15 November 1914, Hitler was accompanying the new regimental commander, Philipp Engelhardt, to the front, when the latter unexpectedly came under fire. Together with another soldier – according to another account, there were four of them – Hitler placed himself in front of the officer to protect him and urged him to take cover.¹⁷⁰ When, at the beginning of December, sixty Iron Crosses Second Class were given out to members of the regiment, among those honoured were the runners who had saved the regimental commander a fortnight earlier.¹⁷¹ Hitler wrote to Joseph Popp, a Munich acquaintance: 'It was the happiest day of my life'.¹⁷²

On 12 March 1915 the regiment took part in a costly German counter-offensive near Neuve Chapelle,¹⁷³ subsequently taking up new positions in front of the village of Fromelles.¹⁷⁴ The regiment was holding a section of the front just over 2,300 metres in length; six companies took it in turns to man the front line, with six remaining in reserve, of which three were quartered in the rear.¹⁷⁵ Most of the time in the forward section was spent in the routine of trench warfare with relatively little combat; the soldiers were occupied, above all, with expanding trenches and fortifications, as well as the struggle to keep water from leaking into the trenches and dealing with vermin. However, there were a number of major engagements. In May 1915 the British breached the line of the 16th Reserve Regiment, which suffered heavy casualties in retaking the position on the following day.¹⁷⁶ In July they managed to thwart a British-Australian attack.¹⁷⁷

In September 1916 the regiment was relieved and, at the beginning of October, deployed to the Battle of the Somme, which had been raging since July as the British ambitiously tried to wear down the German forces in a 'battle of attrition'. On 5 October, the regimental runners' dugout, which was approximately two kilometres behind the front line, was hit by artillery fire. Hitler suffered a wound to the leg and was sent to hospital in Beelitz.¹⁷⁸ He remained there for eight weeks and, while recuperating, used the opportunity to visit nearby Berlin, where, among things, he visited the National Gallery.

At the beginning of November Hitler travelled to Munich in order to join a replacement unit, the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Reflecting on his visits to Beelitz, Berlin, and Munich, Hitler noted in *Mein Kampf* that he had become aware of a powerful mood of defeatism: 'irritation, discontent, and grumbling', cowardice, and 'skiving'. And, he went on, the offices of the home army were packed with Jews; the war economy was in the hands of the Jews.¹⁷⁹ Anti-Semitism was in fact increasing during the second half of the war; there was widespread talk of alleged Jewish 'skivers' and 'war profiteers'. It would, however, be simplistic to assume that this atmosphere reinforced Hitler's anti-Semitism. It is, indeed, remarkable that we do not have any documentary evidence of Hitler's anti-Semitism for the period of the First World War.¹⁸⁰

To prevent his being transferred to another regiment Hitler wrote to Wiedemann, who responded by requesting his transfer to the staff of the 16th Reserve Regiment and, at the beginning of March 1917, Hitler rejoined the regiment, which was now based near La Bassée.¹⁸¹ In April the regiment was driven out of its positions by a Canadian attack,¹⁸² but a few weeks later, after a short pause for rest and recuperation, it was in action once again in the Battle of Arras.¹⁸³ The following months were largely spent resting behind the lines,¹⁸⁴ interrupted by short and bloody engagements in the second half of July, when for two weeks the regiment lay under constant enemy fire, losing 800 men. No longer capable of fighting, it was withdrawn from the front line, but parts of it became involved in the major British offensive that began on 31 July.¹⁸⁵

At the beginning of August the exhausted regiment was transferred to the front in Alsace. Here, in the middle of September 1917, Hitler received the Military Service Cross Third Class¹⁸⁶ and, at the end of the month, was permitted to go on leave, which he spent in Berlin with the parents of a comrade.¹⁸⁷ In the meantime, his regiment had been transferred to the

Champagne region. In March and April 1918 it was once more involved in costly engagements, this time in support of Germany's spring offensive, the last major attempt by the German Army to defeat the Western Allies. In April alone the regiment lost almost half of its soldiers through death, wounds, and disease. After the German offensive came to a halt at the beginning of June, the regiment was pulled out of the front line, but was transferred after only a fortnight to the Marne front and, during the second half of July, became involved in the Battle of the Marne, the last attempt of the German Army to reach Paris. At the end of July, the regiment was withdrawn from this section of the front as well.¹⁸⁸ At the beginning of August, Hitler was awarded the Iron Cross First Class, an extremely rare distinction for someone who was not an officer. It was justified on the grounds that Hitler had carried an important message to the front under heavy enemy fire, although it was probably in recognition of his overall performance.¹⁸⁹ He was put forward by Wiedemann's successor, the regimental adjutant, Lieutenant Hugo Gutmann. As Gutmann was a Jew, in later years Hitler slandered him as a 'coward'.¹⁹⁰

It seems difficult to deny that Hitler was a conscientious and, when it mattered, courageous soldier, even if many accounts by former comrades and superiors are contradictory or seem to have been influenced by the Nazi Party.¹⁹¹ What is crucial, however, is the fact that as a runner he had a special role, which meant that his 'war experiences' were markedly different from those of the majority of German soldiers. Unlike millions of others, he did not have to spend years putting up with living in trenches, which in winter filled up with mud and water, where illnesses such as dysentery and typhus were rampant, and where soldiers were plagued with lice and rats and in summer with huge numbers of flies.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler is quite frank about his anxieties and inner conflicts during the first phase of the war: the 'romance of the battlefield' was soon replaced by 'horror', the initial exuberant joy was 'stifled by mortal fear'. Like everybody else, he too had had to cope with 'the struggle between the instinct for self-preservation and the admonitions of duty'. He describes in striking images how always when 'death was on the hunt' 'a vague something' inside him had tried to revolt, tried 'to represent itself to my weak body as reason', an inner voice, which he had nevertheless been able to identify as nothing but cowardice. It was only after lengthy inner struggle, 'a strong tugging and warning', he wrote, that he was able to overcome these temptations. But 'the more this voice urged me to take heed, the louder and

the more insistently it tempted me, the tougher was my resistance, until finally, after a long inner struggle my sense of duty triumphed.' 'Already in winter 1915/16', in other words after more than a year's experience of war, this inner struggle had ended: 'At last my will was undisputed master.'¹⁹²

Even though this passage is clearly shaped by Hitler's desire to project himself as a 'man of will', it nevertheless reveals something about the inner conflicts he was going through at the time: he was not totally unaffected by the horrors of war. The extreme stress he felt during the first months also left its mark on his letters. In January 1915 he wrote that he was hoping that the attack would soon be launched: 'otherwise, one's nerves are liable to go to pieces'. A fortnight later he confessed to being 'very stressed'; 'in the end' heavy artillery fire 'ruins the strongest nerves'.¹⁹³ Two and a half decades later he had evidently completely rationalized this experience, using it to provide a justification, based on his life experience, for his ideological maxims. In September 1941, in one of his Table Talks, he declared that, in view of the massive suffering and death on the battlefields of the First World War, he had become aware that 'life is a continuous cruel struggle, serving in the final analysis to maintain the species'.¹⁹⁴ Both of these statements – his comments in *Mein Kampf* and the remarks in the Table Talk – show how concerned Hitler was after the event to master the shock of his wartime experience and to use his success in overcoming those anxieties to form part of his self-image.

In the memoirs of his former comrades and superiors Hitler remains a colourless figure, accepted by the group, but a somewhat eccentric loner. During the trips he made with his comrades to the nearby city of Lille, he usually kept to himself and avoided the usual pleasures available behind the front line such as alcohol binges or amorous adventures.¹⁹⁵ In fact, it seems that throughout the war years he had no relationship of any kind with a woman.¹⁹⁶ And, when conversation among his comrades turned to 'Topic No. 1', he brushed it aside, according to Brandmayer, saying he did not have a girlfriend and 'I'll never get round to having one'.¹⁹⁷

His sergeant-major, Amann, recalled that Hitler was the only one of the men under him who never received a parcel from home: 'He didn't have anyone; he was modest and undemanding. But he was a bit odd.' When, on one occasion, there was a surplus in the canteen funds, he had offered Hitler, as the 'poorest man', a small sum of money. But he had rejected the gift.¹⁹⁸

Despite spending years living together with a relatively small and unchanging group of soldiers and NCOs, Hitler did not try to establish closer

contacts or become friends with his comrades. After the end of the war he evidently did not feel the need to maintain personal contacts or cultivate 'war comradeship' with his fellow soldiers. He kept his distance from Amann, whom he employed in the Nazi Party from 1921 onwards, and the same was true of Wiedemann, who became his adjutant in 1933. It is true that after 1933 he was generous in providing jobs or sums of money for any former comrades who turned to him with a request for support; he received them when they visited him and, in 1940, even allowed one of them, Fritz Schmidt, to accompany him on a tour of their old battlefields in Flanders. However, these were the condescending gestures of a powerful patron and had nothing to do with friendship.¹⁹⁹ Significantly, when speaking of his wartime experiences in later years Hitler referred to only one relationship that had affected him emotionally, the one with his dog, Foxl, to which he had become closely attached and which he allowed to sleep with him.²⁰⁰

Politics do not seem to have played a significant part in his conversations with his comrades. However, Hitler became annoyed when anyone cast doubt on a German victory and invariably allowed himself to be provoked by such talk.²⁰¹ One of the other regimental runners, who published his war memoirs in 1932, recalled that Hitler had criticized the munitions workers' strike of January 1918 (a mass protest against the war organized by the Left) and, in particular, attacked the leadership of the Social Democrats. However, Hitler's wartime comrade, Brandmayer, made no mention of endless anti-Semitic tirades, which were to figure so prominently in Hitler's standard repertoire in later years when the question of the 'betrayal' of the front by the homeland came up for discussion.²⁰² Thus, although he writes in another section of his book that Hitler was 'the only one of us... who recognized what has now become a certainty, namely that the war [was] started by Freemasons and Jews', Hitler does not seem to have bothered his comrades with this 'insight'.²⁰³

As far as his political comments at the time were concerned, Hitler expressed himself in *Mein Kampf* in remarkably general terms. He wrote that although, in principle, he had not wanted 'to have anything to do with politics', he had been unable to avoid defining his attitude towards 'certain phenomena that affected the nation as a whole, but most of all us soldiers'. In other words, even he himself did not claim to have tried to inform his comrades at the time about his purported insights concerning the Jews.²⁰⁴

In a letter he wrote at the beginning of February 1915 to an acquaintance, Ernst Hepp, a Munich lawyer, Hitler remarked that he and his comrades

were hoping after the war to find the homeland cleansed 'from foreign influence'; they were fighting at the front against an 'international world of enemies' and wanted 'our internal internationalism to be eliminated as well'.²⁰⁵ This comment exactly reflected the extreme hostility to foreigners and aggressive nationalism that dominated Germany after the outbreak of war; his criticism of 'internal internationalism' no doubt referred to the Social Democrats.

The fact that, even within the army, Hitler remained an outsider and through his role as a runner managed to secure a special position for himself outside the routine of trench warfare²⁰⁶ is a key to his personality. His time in the army is the only period in his life in which, as a thoroughly unorganized person, someone who enjoyed sleeping in, a daydreamer and loner, he was compelled to conform to an organization with fixed rules, structures, and roles; and yet he succeeded relatively quickly in evading these demands as far as he possibly could. He very wisely omitted to mention his role as runner in *Mein Kampf*. In praising the 'iron front of grey helmets', which he had joined out of a sense of duty and without complaint, he did so in order to provide as little detail as possible about his four years of military service.²⁰⁷ And, in fact, when, in the early 1930s, it looked as though Hitler might be about to take over power in Germany, a number of former comrades emerged to accuse him of having led a privileged and less dangerous life in comparison with that of the normal front-line soldier.²⁰⁸

In the last week of August 1918 Hitler was sent to Nuremberg on a short course for couriers, while his regiment had to face further major and costly defensive engagements.²⁰⁹ Shortly afterwards, Hitler was given a second two and a half weeks' leave, which he once again spent in Berlin. He does not mention this stay in *Mein Kampf*, giving the impression that he had spent the whole summer involved in the defensive battles in Flanders. In fact, he only returned to his unit at the end of September.²¹⁰

A few days later, on 3 October, a newly-formed German government, which, for the first time, was responsible to parliament, approached the American president, Woodrow Wilson, with the request for an armistice. This was in response to the 'advice', in effect an ultimatum, from General Ludendorff, who had reached the conclusion that Germany was in immediate danger of losing the war. The request for an armistice – in effect an admission of defeat – came as a complete surprise to the German population and the army, and must have shocked Hitler, who had always been confident of victory. Later, in *Mein Kampf*, he blamed the defeat on the

‘poison in the home front’, which had increasingly affected the troops.²¹¹ According to his later interpretation of events, the disaster had been planned by a coalition of Socialists and Jews. However, it is highly doubtful that he was already thinking along these lines in the autumn of 1918.

Two weeks after his return – in the meantime, the regiment had been transferred to Ypres, in other words the section of the front where it had begun the war four years earlier – Hitler, together with other members of the regimental staff, were caught up in a British gas attack, from which he suffered an eye injury and temporary damage to his sight (according to Hitler, temporary blindness). From 21 October onwards, he was hospitalized in Pasewalk in the Prussian province of Pomerania; while he was there, revolution broke out and the war came to an end.²¹²

With a good deal of self-pity and exaggerated emotion Hitler described in *Mein Kampf* the moment when news reached him in hospital of the fall of the Kaiser’s Reich and the conclusion of the armistice, which sealed Germany’s defeat. According to his account, he was sunk in the deepest despair, had wept for the first time since the death of his mother, and had felt a deep shame, which had had an immediate physical effect. ‘While everything began to go black again before my eyes, stumbling, I groped my way back to the dormitory, threw myself on my bunk and buried my burning head in the blankets and pillows.’ The more he tried ‘to take in this terrible event, the more the shame, indignation and disgrace were branded on my brow’. We do not know what Hitler really thought in Pasewalk. The quotations are evidence from 1924, in which Hitler was trying subsequently to convey to readers how defeat had affected him at the time. But these quotations also have much to say about him.

This picture of a man who was almost thirty years old, throwing himself onto his bed and burying his face in the pillows, wanting to hide because he could not face reality, suggests someone who is reverting to childish behaviour in the face of a situation with which he simply cannot cope. The proof of Hitler’s assertion that his shame was so great that he lost his sight can no longer be tested; it can, however, be read as a metaphor for his refusal to face facts. Shattered by news of the defeat, he responded to this ‘disgrace’ and ‘humiliation’ as an individual who was isolated, in despair, and unable to explain or process these alarming developments.

In November 1918 millions of German soldiers had to get used to the fact that the years of bloody struggle had been for nothing. But for the majority this was a collective experience and not primarily a personal catastrophe.

For most soldiers German defeat meant at the same time the longed-for end to mass slaughter, their return to their families and civilian jobs, and the beginning of a new stage in their lives. Hitler, however, a loner and a loser, could not share the shock of defeat with others and this was primarily the result of his psychological make-up rather than the objective circumstances, nor did he have another life to which he could return. On the contrary: while the outbreak of war in 1914 had given him the chance to get his aimless life back on track, now, after four years of military service, this prospect had been suddenly removed.

According to Hitler's description of his state of mind at the time, during the following days his depression had turned into fury and hatred – hatred of the forces he blamed for the defeat, primarily the 'leaders of Marxism' and 'the Jews'. And, while still in Pasewalk, he claimed he had reached a decision that was to give his life a completely new direction: 'I decided to become a politician'.²¹³

This 'decision' is undoubtedly part of the subsequent self-image that Hitler was creating. Everything points to the fact that, after his release from Pasewalk, far from laying the foundations for a political career, he was simply swept along in the stream of millions of returning soldiers, waiting to see how things would develop after the defeat. It took several months before he emerged from this state of passivity and lethargy, and he only began to become politically active in the summer of 1919 following the initiative and under the auspices of the Reichswehr [German army]. The Pasewalk epiphany – the 'recognition' that 'Jewish Marxism' was responsible for the fatherland's misery – and the resultant decision to 'become a politician' was an attempt by Hitler to conceal his uncertain behaviour during the immediate post-war period. His account is nevertheless highly significant because, if we read between the lines, Hitler is actually describing quite frankly how he succeeded in overcoming his deep shame about the defeat, which had initially plunged him into a state of helplessness. He refused to undertake a sober analysis of the causes of the catastrophe; he was not prepared to admit weaknesses and failure, but instead tried to explain the revolutionary events as the result of a gigantic manipulation. This stoked his anger and his desire for revenge, thereby providing him with the destructive energy necessary to punish those whom he blamed for the deepest humiliation of his life and to overcome his shame.

PART I

The Public Self

I

Back in Munich

Politicization

Following his release from Pasewalk hospital, Hitler arrived in Munich on 21 November 1918. As the 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment, to which he had belonged during the previous four years, was still on its way back from the western front, he was assigned to the 7th Company of the 1st Replacement Battalion of the 2nd Infantry Regiment.¹

On 4 November 1918, a sailors' uprising in the naval base of Kiel sparked off a revolution in Germany; five days later, the Reich government in Berlin was taken over by a Council of People's Representatives, composed of members of the two Socialist parties. Meanwhile, on 7 November the revolution had triumphed in Munich. The uprising under Kurt Eisner, the leader of the Munich branch of the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany [USPD], had quickly forced King Ludwig III to flee from his palace, enabling Eisner, who had met with no resistance, to proclaim Bavaria, the second largest German state, a 'free state'. The war-weariness felt by broad sections of the population and the widespread discontent with the monarchical regime had resulted in major political change. On the following day, 8 November, a 'National Council', made up of representatives of peasants' and soldiers' councils, the parliamentary groups of the SPD and the Bavarian Peasant League, as well as three Liberal deputies, took over the government and declared Eisner Prime Minister.² Soldiers' councils were established in the city's barracks with the 2nd Infantry Regiment council dominated by moderate Social Democrats.³

At the beginning of December, Hitler was assigned to guard duties with the main task of guarding prisoners of war in the Traunstein prisoner-of-war camp, approximately 100 kilometres east of Munich. Surviving reports on conditions in the camp indicate that the discipline of the troops there

was deteriorating fast, of which Hitler must have been fully aware.⁴ At the beginning of February, the camp was closed. Hitler had presumably already returned to Munich in January,⁵ where he was assigned to the regiment's demobilization battalion.⁶ His demobilization was thus only a matter of time.⁷

He had, however, been chosen as his company's soldiers' council representative, a fact that he understandably kept quiet about throughout his life.⁸ The role of these representatives – they were not really soldiers' councillors – was primarily to facilitate the supply of soldiers for farm work.⁹ A special department of the Munich soldiers' council did try to use the representatives to influence soldiers, although it is difficult to estimate the effect of these efforts and there is no evidence for Hitler's involvement.¹⁰ There is, however, no doubt that the Munich troops were under strong left-wing revolutionary influence at this time. On Sunday 16 February, for example, the off-duty soldiers of the demobilization battalion were ordered by the battalion to take part, along with the whole of the Munich garrison, in a demonstration of the revolutionary workers' council to demand the establishment of a Räterepublik (republic based on the councils).¹¹ However, in the state elections of 12 January Eisner's left-wing Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany suffered a crushing defeat, winning only three seats, whereas the moderate Majority Social Democrats [MSPD] won 61 and the Catholic Bavarian People's Party [BVP] 66 seats, each representing about a third of the electorate. Eisner, therefore, decided to resign.

A series of events then occurred which prevented a return to stability. On 21 February, Eisner was assassinated on his way to the opening of parliament by Lieutenant Arco auf Valley, an anti-democrat and anti-Semite. This led to a second revolution in Munich: the MSPD, USPD, Communist Party [KPD], and the Bavarian Peasant League established a Central Council of the Bavarian Republic and martial law was invoked in the city.¹² Eisner's funeral procession on 26 February turned into a powerful demonstration of the Left; 100,000 people are alleged to have taken part, among them *possibly* Adolf Hitler. A film and a photograph have survived, both of which show a soldier who could be Hitler, and in fact twenty-five men of Hitler's battalion and six barracks representatives had been ordered to take part in the procession.¹³

On 17 March, the MSPD, USPD, and Peasants' League formed a new government under the Majority Social Democrat, Johannes Hoffmann,

which obtained a parliamentary majority. This led to a split in the Central Council, with the radical majority aiming to set up a Räterepublik.¹⁴ The barracks councils of the 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments supported this initiative.¹⁵ On 7 April, a Revolutionary Central Council, made up of various council and party representatives, proclaimed a Räterepublik heavily dominated by the USPD.¹⁶ On 13 April, the government, which had fled to Bamberg, failed in its attempt to crush the revolutionary regime with the aid of troops stationed in Munich. This led to the establishment of a new communist Räterepublik,¹⁷ which the following day won the support of the soldiers' representatives of the Munich garrison. A new election of representatives was held on 15 April in which Hitler was re-elected by the 2nd Company. He was now a Replacement Battalion councillor. This, however, does not prove that Hitler was a supporter of the council movement during the first months of 1919, any more than do other examples of Hitler's activity during this period. The fact that he was elected twice by his comrades suggests above all that he wanted to remain in the disintegrating army for as long as possible; as an elected representative he could not so easily be demobilized. In this situation he was obliged to follow the orders of the soldiers' council and, on certain occasions, to act as the representative of his company, although we cannot know what his own political attitude was.¹⁸ This also applies to the brief phase of the communist Räterepublik. Presumably, he behaved much like the other soldiers of his unit, namely waiting to see which way the wind would blow, neither actively supporting the communist regime nor outwardly opposing it.

His own account in *Mein Kampf*, in which he claims to have actively opposed the communist regime and to have escaped arrest on 27 April only by threatening to shoot, is implausible.¹⁹ For there is evidence that, at the time, Hitler did not simply see the MSPD as 'November criminals'. When, at an NSDAP meeting in July 1921, he was defending his fellow Party member, Hermann Esser, against the serious accusation of being a spy, Hitler dismissed it by saying: 'We've all been Social Democrats at one time or another'.²⁰ Also, various statements in his Table Talk from the years 1941/42 make it clear that, with hindsight, he did not see the role of the MSPD during the revolutionary period in entirely negative terms.²¹ However, such comments reflected a view of Social Democracy as an anti-revolutionary force, as a force for order that in the spring of 1919 had opposed further left-wing radicalization. For, united in the aim of bringing the revolutionary experiment in Bavaria to an end as quickly as possible, both the Reich

government and the government in Bavaria had been led by Majority Social Democrats.

The rapid radicalization of the political situation, leading to the establishment of a communist regime, was supported by only a relatively small minority of the population in Munich. The Reich government declared a state of emergency for Bavaria and, at the beginning of May, had the state capital occupied by a large force of troops; hundreds of citizens, accused of supporting the Räterepublik, were murdered.²² The soldiers of the Munich garrison did not take part in the conflict and were disarmed in their barracks by the invading Reich government troops. According to the orders of the new military authorities, those soldiers who had been resident in Munich before the war, were to be demobilized.²³ For Hitler, who had no prospects in civilian life, this would have represented a personal catastrophe. But, once again, he found a way out. Within a week after the end of the Räterepublik he was nominated as a member of a three-man investigation team to look into the behaviour of members of the regiment during the recent events. Had he been using his role as a council representative openly to support the Räterepublik he would not have been picked for this job. As it was, by proving a keen 'investigator' he could now refute any accusations that he had compromised himself politically during the Räterepublik. During his appointment to the investigation commission, on 10 May 1919, he was assigned to the 'Detached Company' and so, for the time being, remained in the army.²⁴ Hitler's former superior on the regimental staff, Sergeant-Major Amann, was very surprised when, on his release from the army, he found himself confronted by Hitler in his new role.²⁵ The commission was investigating, in particular, the former barrack councillor, August Klumpf, who in fact had been an opponent of the councils' regime; the investigation concluded with his complete rehabilitation.²⁶ In another case there is evidence that Hitler was a witness in the court martial of the former chairman of the battalion council of the Demobilisation Battalion, Georg Dufter; he was found not guilty.²⁷

Munich after the crushing of the revolution

Remarkably, conservative Bavaria had been the scene of a socialist revolution that had quickly become radicalized. Now, after the crushing of the councils' regime, there followed a massive political counter-revolution.

On 11 May 1919, Major-General von Möhl, who had used his troops to crush the Munich Räterepublik at the beginning of the month, established Reichswehr Headquarters 4, and, initially with the aid of a state of siege and martial law, took over full authority in Bavaria. Since the government, which had retreated to Bamberg, and the parliament did not return until August, Möhl dominated the political scene in the Bavarian capital for several months. This resulted in a military regime that completely destroyed the radical Left, largely marginalized the MSPD, and decisively encouraged all right-wing, 'counter-revolutionary forces' including the radical ethnic nationalists (Völkische). Public agencies, especially the military and police apparatus, were subjected to a systematic purge and a comprehensive 'security apparatus' was constructed. The Reichswehr headquarters established its own 'information', that is, intelligence department, whose task was to oversee political life in Bavaria and to influence it in the interests of the counter-revolution. This department in turn worked closely with the press and legal department in the city military headquarters under the control of the later Minister of Justice, Christian Roth, as well as with the new police chief, Ernst Poehner. Poehner had an exceptionally loyal assistant in the shape of the head of the police's political department and future Nazi Reich Interior minister, Wilhelm Frick. The newly created state police [Landespolizei] provided a force that had been militarily trained and was particularly geared to the suppression of disturbances and uprisings. In addition, in May 1919, not least through the initiative of Reichswehr captain, Ernst Roehm, home guard units [Einwohnerwehren] were established, a largely middle-class citizens' militia, which, within the space of a few months had a membership of over 200,000. Under right-wing conservative leadership it was considered a reliable guarantee against further revolutionary attempts.²⁸

Thus, the army provided the context for political life during the following months. It was dominated above all by an apparently hysterical fear of revolution, seen as liable to produce a Bolshevik reign of terror; by a resultant excessive desire for security and order at all costs; by a wave of anti-Semitism, as a number of leading representatives of the revolution were Jews; and by frustration with the unexpectedly harsh conditions of the peace treaty revealed on 7 May 1919, which produced defiant nationalist protests. The model form of parliamentary democracy introduced in the Reich in autumn 1918 in the expectation of a mild peace treaty had now been discredited, particularly among bourgeois, nationalist circles.

The heated debate that dominated German domestic politics until the acceptance of the peace conditions by the Reichstag on 23 June 1919 and the campaign against the 'November criminals' and the 'fulfillment politicians' hardened attitudes towards any left-wing or liberal politics, especially in Munich.

Hostility to socialism, fear of disorder, anti-Semitism, and nationalism were all key attitudes the dominant right-wing conservative circles in Munich shared with the extreme rightist *völkisch* element in the city. The latter's radical activities were not new, indeed they pre-dated the war, but, under the post-revolutionary military regime, groups that in the past had been considered marginal sects now acquired political importance.²⁹ This produced the fertile soil that made Munich the 'birthplace' of National Socialism. And, it was only in this febrile atmosphere that, as we shall see, Hitler was to become politically engaged.

A dense network of extreme right-wing organizations emerged under the protection of the army and police, with a central role played by the Thule Society. It had been established in the summer of 1918 as a lodge-type association by an already existing anti-Semitic secret society, the Germanenorden. Disguised as a society 'for Research into German history and the Promotion of German Ways', it provided the Germanenorden with a public platform and recruitment centre. The founder of the Thule Society and the dominant figure in it was Adam Alfred Rudolf Glauer, who called himself Rudolf von Sebottendorf. Under the leadership of this adventurer the Thule Society established itself during the *Räterepublik* as the clandestine fulcrum of the counter-revolution. In particular, it assisted in the formation of the Free Corps* Epp and Oberland and placed its headquarters in the prestigious Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten at the disposal of other extreme right-wing groups. When the counter-revolutionary troops marched into Munich in May, the Thule Society, along with other extreme right groups, tried to start its own uprising. A number of its leading activists were shot by supporters of the *Räterepublik* and from then onwards were regarded as martyrs of the 'red terror'. After the capture of the city the Thule Society continued to remain in the background, at the heart of the *völkisch*-extreme right milieu and linking it closely

* Translators' note: Free Corps were paramilitary units recruited by the Reich government from volunteers in order to suppress revolution, not unlike the Black and Tans in Ireland during the same years.

with the right-wing conservative establishment. This elitist, doctrinaire racist society had approximately 250 members.³⁰ However, its newspaper, the *Münchener Beobachter*, bought by the society in August 1918, was the main mouthpiece of the völkisch movement in post-war Munich.

The Deutsch-völkische Schutz- und Trutzbund [German League for Protection and Defiance] was also of vital importance for Munich's extreme right-wing scene during 1919. This organization, with its headquarters in Hamburg, had been founded in February 1919 by the extreme nationalist and imperialist Pan-German League as a platform for an anti-Semitic campaign aiming for the broadest possible impact.³¹ It had a nation-wide organization, was centrally controlled, and flooded Germany with hitherto unprecedented amounts of extreme anti-Semitic propaganda.³² In the summer of 1919, Munich acquired one of its most active local branches, with, in November 1919, 1,500 and, in the summer of the following year, 4,000 members;³³ it met in the rooms of the Thule Society. One of its leading figures was Dietrich Eckart, a dynamic figure within the völkisch intelligentsia, who provided it with pamphlet material and offered close cooperation with his – admittedly only moderately effective – Deutsche Bürgervereinigung [German Citizens' Association], which, in turn, was supported by Sebottendorf's *Münchener Beobachter*.³⁴ Eckart acted as a speaker for the Schutz- und Trutzbund, as did the civil engineer, Gottfried Feder, one of the leading figures in the Munich völkisch movement, whose slogan 'breaking interest slavery' was adopted by the Schutz- und Trutzbund.³⁵ The publishers, Julius Friedrich Lehmann and Ernst Boepple, as well as the journalists, Erich Kühn and Marc (really Max) Sesselmann, also joined the Munich branch.

Lehmann, who, like Sesselmann, was also a member of the Thule, had a prominent role in the Munich branch of the Pan German League, maintaining the link between this organization, which was now operating more in the background, and the Schutz- und Trutzbund's activities.³⁶ The Munich branch of the Bayerische Mittelpartei [Bavarian Middle Party], which represented the conservative German Nationalist People's Party (DNVP) in Bavaria, had close personal links with the Schutz- und Trutzbund. While in its December 1918 programme the party had included a clause clearly rejecting German Jewry, in the second half of 1919 it significantly hardened its anti-Semitic stance. It was now demanding nothing less than the exclusion of German Jews from the 'direction of all our political, economic, and cultural affairs'.³⁷

In the second half of 1919 the völkisch-extreme right-wing movement in Munich launched an anti-Jewish campaign that resulted in anti-Semitism developing into a dominant political force in the city and the surrounding area. Elsewhere in the Reich the Schutz- und Trutzbund and many other extreme right-wing groups were also active,³⁸ but in Munich the 'anti-Semitic wave' (as people quickly called it) that had been unleashed, had a devastating effect. Apart from the high level of engagement on the part of the Munich right-wing extremists, this resulted from the fact that, during spring and summer 1919, the de facto military regime not only tolerated this agitation but actively encouraged it, for example through a systematic policy of expelling 'Eastern Jews'.³⁹ Also, the extensive suppression of the Left allowed anti-Semitism to spread almost unhindered.

Thus, during these months, anti-Semitic agitation, particularly in Munich, was ubiquitous: Jews were accused of being war profiteers and black marketeers, and of having avoided front-line service during the war; fear of the immigration of eastern Jews was stoked; there were attacks on the 'Jewification' of German culture and so on. However, out of this confusion of resentments emerged a particularly potent stereotype as the core idea stoking anti-Jewish feeling: the assertion that the revolution that had just been suppressed had been above all a 'Jewish' affair. Was it not the case that numerous leaders of the Soviet and Hungarian revolutions were Jews? And did not Eisner and a number of prominent revolutionaries in Bavaria such as Ernst Toller, Erich Mühsam, Gustav Landauer, or Eugen Leviné have Jewish, in some cases eastern Jewish, roots? Although the Jewish revolutionaries had long since given up their Jewish identity, and the majority of revolutionaries were not Jews, just as the majority of Munich Jews had not been revolutionaries, such objections had little effect. The fear on the part of large sections of the population of a recurrence of revolution could be exploited with the slogan 'Jewish Bolshevism'. A slogan had been found that appealed to the masses, including many in the political centre, ground and could be linked to all the other anti-Jewish prejudices and attitudes that were so rife in the Bavarian capital at that time.⁴⁰

'Take the Jews into protective custody and then there'll be peace at home!' was the message that the Schutz- und Trutzbund regularly published in the *Münchener Beobachter* from spring 1919 onwards, and which continued:

Jews agitate in favour of Spartakism†
 Jews whip up the people in the streets
 Jews push themselves to the top everywhere
 Jews prevent Germans from reaching an understanding with one another

Therefore:

Away with the Jewish profiteers and troublemakers
 Germany for the Germans! Let that be the watchword in our struggle for
 liberation.

Hitler's indoctrination by the Reichswehr

This massive anti-Semitic campaign and general shift to the Right provides the background to the Reichswehr Information Department's plan of using political and ideological indoctrination in order to immunize the soldiers of the Munich garrison against socialist and other 'dangerous' ideas. In June 1919 the department began holding courses at Munich University. Research has shown that Hitler, who had so far managed to avoid demobilization, took part only in the third course, which lasted from 10 to 19 July.⁴¹ Before the start of the course he had been assigned to the 'winding-up unit', which was demobilizing his old regiment.⁴² The courses were organized by Captain Karl Mayr, the very active head of the propaganda section within the Information Department, who at this time was a hard line anti-Semite and important supporter of the extreme Right. During the final phase of the Räterepublik he had played a significant role in the coordination of the military activities of the Thule⁴³ and, among other things, was close to Dietrich Eckart.⁴⁴

This indoctrination took the form of lectures and seminars, which involved discussion and coaching in public speaking. The seminars were led by the writer, Count Carl von Bothmer, who worked for 'Heimatdienst Bayern', a propaganda organization established immediately after the crushing

† Translators' note: The Spartakist League was a group of left-wing Socialists opposed to the decision of the majority of the SPD to participate in the First World War and committed to a proletarian revolution. In 1916 it acquired the title 'Spartakus League' (Spartakistenbund) from the title of its newsletters, the *Spartakusbriefe*. On 1 January 1919 it was subsumed into the new German Communist Party (KPD). Shortly afterwards it began an uprising in Berlin against the Socialist government, which was quickly crushed by right-wing Free Corps, who murdered its leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

of the Räterepublik, with a largely 'anti-Bolshevist' agenda.⁴⁵ Bothmer was on the extreme Right, had known Eckart for a long time and often published articles in the latter's paper, *Auf gut deutsch*.⁴⁶ According to the surviving course programme he was involved in giving two lectures: about the SPD's Erfurt programme of 1891 and about 'the connexion between domestic and foreign policy'. Other lecturers spoke on various topics concerning economics and social policy.⁴⁷ Course III did not follow this programme exactly; for example, it is evident that Gottfried Feder stood in with a lecture on the 'breaking of interest slavery'.⁴⁸ Yet even if it is not possible to know the exact content of the third course, it is clear from the overall pattern of the lectures given in the various courses that the indoctrination was composed primarily of anti-Bolshevism, rejection of 'war guilt', the encouragement of confidence in future economic developments, and a good dose of nationalism.⁴⁹ Although the topic was not specifically referred to in the programme, anti-Semitism must also have played a vital role, at least under the surface. Mayr, Bothmer, and Feder were all anti-Semites, and the Munich Reichswehr garrison saw the growth of anti-Semitism in the barracks during the summer as a positive sign, while officially disapproving of its more extreme manifestations.⁵⁰

In August 1919, Hitler, who had apparently stood out as a particularly enthusiastic participant on the course,⁵¹ was selected by Mayr's department as a propaganda speaker.⁵² In Lechfeld camp near Augsburg a so-called enlightenment commando made up of two dozen soldiers was deployed to politically indoctrinate soldiers returning from prisoner-of-war camps in order to inoculate them against revolutionary tendencies. For the Munich Reichswehr commanders believed the situation in the camp was explosive. The head of the section responsible for recruiting soldiers to serve in the post-war Reichswehr was reporting that he had obtained a very 'unfavourable impression' of the mood in the camp: the soil there had been 'already contaminated with Bolsheism [sic!] and Spartakism'.⁵³

It is clear from the available reports of the indoctrination, which in fact was directed not at returning soldiers but at soldiers on guard duty,⁵⁴ that, apart from the commanding officer of the commando, it was above all Hitler who had distinguished himself with a series of lectures and contributions in the discussion. In general, his talent as a 'born popular speaker' was emphasized, and his lively and easily understood lectures had had a positive impact on the soldiers. According to the report, Hitler had talked about 'Peace Conditions and Reconstruction' and 'Social and Economic Slogans'. However,

his performance led to a discussion among the organizers as to whether it was tactically advisable for him to be so overtly anti-Semitic in his statements, if they were to avoid the accusation of 'anti-Jewish rabble-rousing'. The commander of the guard unit responsible for the lectures then felt obliged to issue an order requiring the exercise of more caution on this issue and 'as far as possible to avoid too overt references to this race that is foreign to the German people'. However, in his report to his superiors the same officer emphasized his agreement with the content of such tirades; it was thus merely a question of whether Hitler's overtly anti-Semitic language was *opportune*.⁵⁵ In fact, the 'enlightenment' of the troops, in the form in which it had taken place in Lechfeld, was discontinued, as it was judged by the Reichswehr and indeed by Mayr himself to have been ineffective.⁵⁶

The Reichswehr's view of anti-Semitism as an essential component of their 'enlightenment programme' is particularly evident from a letter that, at Mayr's instigation, Hitler wrote after the conclusion of the course to a participant, Adolf Gemlich, who had requested further clarification of the 'Jewish question'. Hitler replied in detail and in his letter of 16 September compared various forms of hostility to the Jews. He advised against anti-Semitism as a 'purely emotional phenomenon'. Rather, 'anti-Semitism as a political movement' must be determined by 'the recognition of facts'. Hitler then spent the following pages outlining some of these 'facts'. Jewry was 'definitely a race and not a religious community' and, what is more, a race that had preserved its characteristics through 'thousands of years of inbreeding', so that now living 'among us' was a 'non-German, foreign race' that differed markedly from the Germans and yet possessed the same rights. Jewish ideas and actions, Hitler continued, were determined solely by the desire for material possessions; Jewish power, therefore, is 'the power of money, which in the form of interest effortlessly and endlessly accumulates in their hands and burdens the nations with that dangerous yoke.... Everything that prompts humanity to strive for higher things, whether religion, socialism, or democracy', was for 'the Jew' merely a 'means to the end of satisfying his desire for money and power'. From this Hitler concluded: 'His activities will infect the nations with racial tuberculosis'. His central message was contained in the following paragraph: 'Emotional anti-Semitism' will 'find its ultimate expression in the form of programs' (Hitler did in fact spell the word wrongly); 'rational anti-Semitism, on the other hand, must [lead] to the planned legal combatting and removal of Jewish privileges', in other words to 'legislation for foreigners' aimed at the Jews. The final goal of this

'rational anti-Semitism' must, however, 'irrevocably be the removal of the Jews altogether'. However, the current government was incapable of carrying out such steps, indeed rather was compelled 'to seek support from those who have exploited and are continuing to exploit the new situation in Germany and who, for this reason, were the driving forces of the revolution, the Jews'.

In order to confer authority on the position adopted by Hitler, Mayr enclosed an accompanying letter in which he declared that he basically agreed with the views of his speaker. There was only one point, Mayr made clear, on which his views differed from those of Hitler: in his opinion the 'interest problem' was not, as Hitler, basing his views on his indoctrination lecturer, Feder, had written, the result of Jewish machinations, but rather essentially the consequence of a 'healthy instinct for acquisition'. It was thus only necessary to combat its 'excesses', which were of course caused by Jews. However, by indicating this difference in view, Mayr was in effect underlining his agreement with Hitler on the other central points.⁵⁷ Thus, this first anti-Semitic statement by Hitler that we possess should not be read simply as documenting the anti-Jewish attitude that he was developing during these months. In the first instance, it represents an official statement by the Munich Reichswehr's Information Department, outlining the stance it was adopting towards anti-Semitism. The letter, therefore, throws light on what kind of indoctrination Hitler had been receiving during this period.

The arguments that Hitler used in this letter were not at all original but are expressed in very similar terms in contemporary anti-Semitic literature.⁵⁸ Thus with his distinction between 'P(r)ogrom' and 'rational anti-Semitism' Hitler had adopted a trope that was current during these weeks and months. The concept of a pogrom, which before the war had almost solely referred to violent attacks on Jews in Eastern Europe, now, in 1919, was increasingly also being used as a synonym for a radical 'solution' to the 'Jewish question' in Germany.⁵⁹ In August the well-known Leipzig anti-Semite Heinrich Pudor had published an article in the pamphlet series *Deutscher Volksrat* in which he maintained that the state had missed the opportunity to limit the alleged dominance of the Jews by legal means; in view of this situation, there could be 'no objection to pogroms if they fulfilled their purpose'.⁶⁰ In the *Münchener Beobachter* of 29 October 1919 there appeared an article signed 'Hartmut', which rejected the 'solution of the Jewish question' through pogroms and instead demanded that Jews be stripped of their civil rights. Thus, with his comments in the so-called

Gemlich letter Hitler was very much au fait with the discussions going on within the anti-Semitic movement.

Thus, Hitler's growing interest in politics and the initial shaping of his ideology took place within the context of the crushing of the revolution and his indoctrination by the Reichswehr. There is no reliable contemporary evidence that Hitler had been politicized at an earlier stage: no written statements of his, no memoirs of comrades, no references in the army files. His efforts in *Mein Kampf* to date his gradual politicization from 1916 and to declare the revolution to have been the key event is part of an obvious attempt at creating a self-image. More than that, Hitler's politicization in spring 1919 was not the result of his own initiative (in the sense of: 'I decided to become a politician'), but rather occurred through a job involving political topics which he was given by the Reichswehr as part of its attempt to prevent its soldiers from participating in revolution. He had proved himself in the eyes of his superiors through his work in the counter-revolutionary investigation commission and had become involved in Mayr's propaganda activities: it was through him that Hitler received a real political education.⁶¹

The role of propagandist and agitator in turn offered Hitler the only opportunity of maintaining his status as a soldier. That is what he had been trying to achieve for months. For what other opportunities did he have? As far as his family was concerned, he only had relatives with whom he had broken off contact. He had no educational qualifications and the thirty-year-old lacked the financial means and the school leaving certificate that would enable him to embark on the course of study to which he had aspired in the past. Was he going to have to resume selling his painted post-cards and water colours round about the Munich Frauenkirche?

Moreover, the counter-revolutionary programme that Mayr had tried to drum into the soldiers – anti-socialism, nationalism, anti-Semitism – was entirely compatible with the basic convictions Hitler had acquired in the course of his youth. As we have seen, he came from a 'German Nationalist' milieu in old Austria and since his school days had developed increasingly strong 'Pan-German' sympathies. For him it was obvious that the Austrian Germans should join a powerful German Reich. Now, after the collapse both of the Habsburg Monarchy and of the 'little German' Kaiserreich, these ideas seemed to be about to be fulfilled; it looked as if the greater German solution, the national unity of all those with a German heritage and of German origin, was now on the table as a serious option. It offered new perspectives for Germany's severely damaged national consciousness.

Indeed, on 12 February 1919 a large majority of the German national assembly voted in favour of such a union, as had the Austrian parliament in Vienna. But it was blocked by the victorious Allies.

Hitler had been wary of the socialist workers' movement, not least because of his lower middle-class background, and in the anti-revolutionary wave that swept through Munich in spring 1919 he did not find it difficult to move from wariness to hostility and hatred. He was bound to agree with the legend successfully peddled by the old military elite that the German army had been defeated through 'a stab in the back' from the home front.⁶²

Above all, however, anti-Semitism, which spread like wildfire during the summer of 1919, provided Hitler with both a convincing explanation for the catastrophic conditions as well as a handbook for the future. Hitler was one of those who eagerly grasped the idea that the revolution had been above all the work of Jews and it was now necessary to eradicate 'Jewish Bolshevism'. Moreover, as the Gemlich letter shows, for him the notion 'Jew' represented the unscrupulous and amoral greed of finance capital and so anti-Semitism (and not the socialism of the Left) was the key to removing this exploitative system. The stereotype 'Jewish capitalism' would also offer him an explanation in the future for the ruthless policy of the Western Allies, who, in the process of implementing their tough peace conditions, evidently wanted to 'destroy' Germany. This was in fact a very widespread view in post-war Germany.⁶³

While during his time in Vienna Hitler had, as we have seen, considered anti-Semitism one among a number of 'antis', one factor among others that appeared to explain the impending collapse of the Habsburg empire (at that time the decisive issue in his Pan-German world view), now the whole situation had radically changed. In the shape of the dual threat posed by 'Jewish Bolshevism' and 'Jewish capitalism' Hitler felt confronted with a set of dangers that threatened not only the existing social order and the German people but the whole of the civilized world. From his distorted perspective it represented an apocalyptic threat. Thus, anti-Semitism moved from the margins to the centre of his world view. The image of the enemy that he worked out in the course of these months also enabled him to overcome the deep shame that he had felt in Pasewalk and to master the uncertainty of the months that followed. The defeat, which initially had seemed to him completely incomprehensible and undeserved, and the rapid political radicalization prompted by the revolution, in which he too had been swept up, all this could now be seen as the result of a manipulation that had been a long time in the planning.

2

Joining the Party

After his return from Lechfeld Camp, Hitler, who was still with the 'demobilization unit' of the 2nd Infantry Regiment, carried out a number of small tasks for Mayr.¹ However, as the Reichswehr had abandoned the idea of indoctrination courses such as those held in Lechfeld, Hitler was on the look-out for a new job in his role as a propagandist. He found one quite quickly after Mayr spotted the small German Workers Party (DAP) among the fifty or so political groups that had established themselves in Munich and the surrounding area.²

The story is well-known; it has been told a thousand times. On 12 September 1919, on an assignment from the Reichswehr's Intelligence Section, Hitler attended a meeting of the German Workers' Party in the Sterneckerbräu, a pub near the Isartor, where slightly more than forty people had assembled to listen to speeches by Gottfried Feder and a Professor Baumann.³ During the subsequent discussion Hitler drew attention to himself with a forceful contribution and was then invited by the chairman of the local branch, Anton Drexler, to become a member. After careful consideration Hitler agreed to do so and, thanks to his rhetorical gift, soon became the party's main attraction. Under his dominant influence it rapidly expanded, consolidating its organization, until he formally took over the party leadership.⁴ The story represents the core of the 'party legend', invented by Hitler, outlined at length in *Mein Kampf*, referred to again and again in hundreds of his speeches, and continually repeated after 1945.⁵

The legend can, however, be disproved with relative ease. For a start, during the 1930s, Drexler, the chairman in 1919, understandably objected to Hitler's claim that he joined the party as member No. 7. The only thing that is certain is that Hitler was one of the first 200 or so members who had joined the party by the end of 1919.⁶ But much more important is the fact

that the success of the DAP, later NSDAP, in Munich was not, as Hitler later maintained, the result of his 'decision' to join it.

As we have seen, at the time when Hitler came across the DAP, an extreme right-wing and *völkisch* milieu, composed of a network of organizations with close links to the Munich establishment, already existed. The DAP was a well-established component of this milieu; in 1919 there were already a number of key figures in the extreme right-wing and *völkisch* scene who were active in the party and, before the end of the year, in other words before Hitler had become a major player, the young party had received support from various quarters. The aim was to establish, and provide continuing support for, a political party within the extreme right-wing movement that would focus its appeal specifically on the working class, in order to immunize it against socialist ideas.

The DAP and the extreme right-wing scene in Munich

The initiative had been taken, at the end of 1918, by Anton Drexler,⁷ a locksmith in a workshop of the Bavarian railways, and Karl Harrer,⁸ a sports journalist on the *München-Augsburger Abendzeitung*. They founded a 'Workers' Political Circle' in which a handful of members – most of them railway workers like Drexler – discussed the political situation produced by the defeat and revolution. They were primarily concerned with the question of how to produce a counterweight to the dominant socialists, whom they blamed for the outcome of the war, and focused on trying somehow to introduce a social component into nationalism and anti-Semitism.

At the beginning of 1919, the 'Workers' Political Circle' gave birth to the German Workers' Party [Deutsche Arbeiterpartei]. Under Harrer's leadership it had around two dozen members, most of them railwaymen, who were loyal to the established order and strongly nationalist. This move was evidently influenced by the Thule Society, of which both Harrer and Drexler were members. At any rate, in a book published in 1933 and quickly withdrawn by the regime, Sebottendorf claimed to have been responsible, together with Harrer and Drexler, for establishing, on 18 January 1919 in the premises of the Thule Society, a 'national socialist workers' association'.⁹ It was necessary for the DAP formally to operate as an 'association' [Verein] in order to satisfy the terms of the Law of Associations. In the 1930s Drexler

recalled that the party had met in the premises of the Thule Society.¹⁰ Membership meetings were held, and in addition the 'Workers' Circle', which initially formed the de facto leadership, met separately to discuss above all the causes of the defeat and the revolution.¹¹ Drexler, who also wrote for the *Münchener Beobachter*, the mouthpiece of the Thule Society, and was highly praised by Eckart in his paper, *Auf gut Deutsch*,¹² published a forty-page political pamphlet, claiming that the existing socialist movement was 'simply the vehicle... for dominating the whole world through Jewish money and the Jewish press'.¹³

According to Hitler, he encountered the DAP as part of an intelligence assignment and then 'decided' to join. What is certain is that he attended a party meeting on 12 September 1919 and a few days later – in response to Drexler's prompting – joined the DAP. The circumstances were, however, probably somewhat different from what he later maintained. For everything points to the fact that Mayr, the propaganda chief of the Reichswehr's Information Department, placed his star speaker, Hitler, at the disposal of the DAP, in order to increase the party's influence within the extreme right-wing milieu, which he was actively supporting.¹⁴ Thus Hitler had not been given an intelligence assignment but rather a purely propaganda role within the range of tasks that he performed for Mayr until March 1920, when he left the Reichswehr. From October 1919 onwards, he was employed by Mayr as an assistant to the education officer of the 41st Rifle Regiment, where he looked after the regimental library and so had the opportunity of perusing right-wing propaganda material, with which the Reichswehr was well supplied.¹⁵ In addition, during January and February 1920, Hitler also gave lectures to members of the Reichswehr¹⁶ and wrote a number of articles at Mayr's request.¹⁷

Moreover, Hitler did not attend the DAP meeting alone; he was accompanied by Sergeant-Major Alois Grillmeier, who, like Hitler, had been a member of the Investigation Commission into Bolshevik Activities and who also joined the DAP,¹⁸ and by six other of Mayr's former propagandists.¹⁹ Mayr had himself been expected to attend the meeting, as is noted on the attendance list;²⁰ on 12 November, he did indeed turn up to a DAP meeting.²¹ And Mayr did more: he assigned a second propagandist to the DAP in the shape of Hermann Esser, a former NCO and editorial assistant in Mayr's press department, who soon assumed a prominent role in the party, becoming one of its leading speakers, along with Hitler, Drexler, and Feder.²² Moreover, by introducing Captain Ernst Röhm to the DAP, Mayr provided

it with an important contact. For Röhm was adjutant to the commander of the 21st Infantry Brigade, Colonel von Epp,²³ and himself heavily involved in the Reichswehr's support for the Einwohnerwehren. According to Röhm, he had already got to know Hitler before the latter had joined the DAP at Mayr's instigation. They had met at an event at the *Eiserne Faust* [Iron Fist], a right-wing officers' club. Hitler later recalled that he had already met Röhm in spring 1919. The first evidence we have of Röhm attending a meeting of the DAP is from October, shortly after which he joined the party. He was to become one of Hitler's keenest supporters.²⁴

The DAP and Hitler also had a direct line to the city commandant's office, which played an important role in the re-establishment of 'law and order' after the crushing of the Räterepublik. The city commandant of Munich, Major Konstantin Hierl, was an early mentor of the DAP and went on to become the head of the Reich Labour Service during the Third Reich. In July 1920 Hitler sent him a detailed description of the party's organization, which reads like an official report.²⁵ Thus, at the beginning of Hitler's political career, the DAP enjoyed the support of three important military institutions, which during these months were heavily involved in reorganizing political life in Munich: the Information Department [Mayr], the City Commandant's Office [Hierl], and the staff of the Reichswehr unit stationed in Munich (21st Infantry Brigade/Röhm).

Other members of the Reichswehr also helped the DAP to get started. Thus, in the autumn of 1919, Captain Eduard Dietl was already a member of the DAP. And, although he left it again in 1920 – officers were in principle not permitted to be members of political parties – he remained sympathetic. When Dietl, by then a Colonel-General of the Wehrmacht, was killed in an air crash in 1944, Hitler commented at his memorial service that he, Dietl, had been the first Reichswehr officer to give him the opportunity to speak to his company and that Dietl had subsequently declared his absolute loyalty to him. In 1923 Dietl was to prove this by, on the instructions of the Reichswehr, helping to train the SA and then, finally, on the occasion of the so-called Hitler putsch of 8 November, declaring his support for the putschists.²⁶ Vice-Sergeant-Major Rudolf Schüssler can be shown to have taken part in a meeting of the DAP on 16 October 1919 at which Hitler spoke; he joined the party at the end of 1919, becoming party secretary at the beginning of 1920. He is believed to have dealt with party business in his barracks.²⁷ Among the other early members of the DAP whom Hitler recruited from the Reichswehr was Karl Tiefenböck,²⁸ a former member of the group

of runners from the 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment. And another old acquaintance whom Hitler won over to the DAP was Joseph Popp, his pre-war landlord.²⁹

In addition, within the DAP Hitler met several important figures involved in extreme right-wing journalism. Among them was Dietrich Eckart, a modestly successful völkisch poet, dramatist, and journalist, who has already been referred to. Eckart's best-known work was a translation, or rather a freely rendered version, of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, which was regularly performed on the German stage. During the war, he had become politicized: he published a series of pamphlets in which he complained that negative reviews by Jews were responsible for his lack of success and that Jews were to blame for everything.³⁰ In 1915 he established the Hoheneichen-Verlag publishing company and, in December 1918, the anti-socialist and anti-Semitic weekly, *Auf gut deutsch*, in which, among others, Feder and Bothmer published articles.³¹ Eckart was involved in the DAP before Hitler arrived, among other things as a speaker.³² He was not a member but acted as an influential sponsor. He had a sound reputation in conservative circles, enabling him to collect considerable donations for the party.³³ He also supported it out of his own resources.³⁴ Among the authors writing for *Auf gut deutsch* and published by the Hoheneichen-Verlag was Alfred Rosenberg, a young Baltic German who had emigrated from Reval (Tallin) to Munich in December 1918. Rosenberg, who was also recorded as a 'guest' of the Thule Society,³⁵ introduced several members of the Baltic German emigré scene to the DAP. He got to know Hitler through Eckart.³⁶

In March 1920, Julius Friedrich Lehmann, head of the Lehmann publishing house and referred to previously, joined the now renamed NSDAP. Apart from publishing learned medical works, he was also responsible for a series of eugenic, anti-Semitic and nationalist books and pamphlets. Through his leading role in the Pan-German League and the Deutsch-völkische Schutz- und Trutzbund Lehmann ensured that the NSDAP secured support from these organizations as well.³⁷ The extent to which the völkisch scene formed a dense network is demonstrated by the Deutscher Volksverlag press, which Lehmann founded in April 1919. Run by Ernst Boepple, another early member of the DAP,³⁸ who was simultaneously a member of the Schutz- und Trutzbund, it was responsible for publishing Drexler's pamphlet as well as the early works of Alfred Rosenberg and Eckart's *Peer Gynt* translation. Another example is Wilhelm Gutberlet, a member of the Thule Society and a partner in another völkisch publishing firm, the Eher Verlag,

who was one of those who attended the DAP meeting of 12 September at which Hitler appeared for the first time and, in October 1920, gave his shares in the firm to the DAP.³⁹

In October and November 1919 Erich Kühn, the editor of the Pan-German League's journal *Deutschlands Erneuerung* [Germany's Renewal], spoke at meetings of the DAP.⁴⁰ In return, Hitler, who in the meantime had become moderately well-known, defended the League against the accusation of having been responsible for the war: 'it wasn't Pan-Germans; it was Pan-Jews'.⁴¹ Three and a half months later, Privy Councillor Heinrich Class, the influential chairman of the Pan-German League, who was based in Berlin, sent the DAP 3,000 Reich marks [RM]. Significantly, the money was received via Captain Mayr. In other words, the captain was still keeping a protective eye on the party. Soon afterwards, Class donated another 1,000 RM to finance a propaganda trip by Hitler round Austria.⁴² Also, right from the start, the DAP received a helping hand from the Deutsch-völkische Schutz- und Trutzbund.⁴³ Apart from Lehmann, this was true above all of Paul Tafel, an engineer with idiosyncratic ideas about a new economic order, who had already become a member of the DAP in 1919,⁴⁴ and of Ferdinand Wiegand, the Munich district manager of a Hamburg firm, who for a few months in 1920 even became the DAP's first secretary.⁴⁵

In addition, Gottfried Feder, who has been frequently referred to, played a key role as a link man in the völkisch scene in Munich. An early member of the DAP⁴⁶ and founder of his own modestly successful organization, the Combat League for Breaking Interest Slavery, Feder was a valued speaker for the extreme Right. Apart from giving speeches for his own organization,⁴⁷ the DAP,⁴⁸ and the Reichswehr – Hitler had heard him speak at Mayr's indoctrination course – Feder was also on the bill at the first public meeting of the Munich Schutz- und Trutzbund on 1 December 1919.⁴⁹ Marc Sesselmann was equally well connected. Born in 1898, a member of the Thule Society and the early DAP,⁵⁰ he was active in the Schutzbund and also involved in founding the Deutschsozialistische Partei (DSP) in Munich.⁵¹ In May 1919, Sesselmann, along with Thule members Hans Georg Müller and Friedrich Wieser, took over the editorship of the *Münchener Beobachter*, retaining it until March 1920;⁵² its national edition had been renamed the *Völkischer Beobachter* in August 1919. In the autumn of 1919 and at the beginning of 1920 he and Hitler spoke at various engagements organized by the DAP and the Schutzbund.⁵³

Sesselmann, who was active in the DAP and the DSP, was not the only member of the dense völkisch–anti-Semitic network in Munich who joined more than one political party. At the end of 1918, Alfred Brunner, a mechanical engineer from Düsseldorf, proposed founding a German Socialist Party [*Deutschsozialistische Partei* = DSP],⁵⁴ and his idea was taken up by the Thule Society. At Christmas 1918, the Society launched the party with a programme drafted by Brunner (although he was not mentioned by name). Alongside its initiative in founding the DAP, Thule supported the establishment of a local branch of the DSP in Munich,⁵⁵ which, mainly thanks to the efforts of Müller and Sesselmann,⁵⁶ took place in May 1919. In the autumn of 1919, a German Socialist Working Group [*Deutschsozialistische Arbeitsgemeinschaft*] was also established in Munich.⁵⁷ In November, another important DSP local branch was founded, this time in Nuremberg, which was recruited largely from members of the Schutz- und Trutzbund. The party was officially established at Reich level in April 1920. Its programme was more or less identical with that of the DAP: the main difference was that the DSP followed a parliamentary strategy, albeit initially without success. In the election to the first Reichstag on 6 June 1920 it received only 7,186 votes (0.03 per cent).

On 16 October 1919, at the DAP's first public meeting, the main speaker was not Hitler but the Pan-German journalist, Erich Kühn.⁵⁸ However, Hitler, a new member, intervened in the discussion with a lengthy anti-Semitic diatribe and, from November onwards, spoke at further DAP meetings in Munich beer halls, often with other speakers from the party (Feder, Drexler, and others), to audiences of 300–400 people.⁵⁹ On 10 December 1919 and then again on 23 January 1920 he was the main speaker.⁶⁰

Before the DAP took the stage in front of a wider public, Hitler succeeded in getting rid of the party leader, Harrer. Hitler maintained later that Harrer had wanted to hang on to the idea of the party as a kind of political study group, thereby blocking Hitler's more ambitious plans. However, this account is implausible.⁶¹ In fact, at the end of 1919, Harrer was sounding out the possibility of cooperation with the *Deutschnationale Volkspartei* [German National People's Party (DNVP)] in Berlin. This was the most important right-wing Conservative party in Germany, which was trying to bring together all the right-wing conservative and völkisch forces in the Reich; however, it did not yet have a state-wide organization in Bavaria. It was only in March 1920 that it managed to establish a permanent link with the (Bavarian) *Mittelpartei*. In December 1919, the secretary of the DNVP,

Hans-Erdmann von Lindener-Wildau, met Harrer during a trip to Bavaria and they both concluded that politically they were largely in agreement. Harrer gave assurances that the DAP would not put up its own list of candidates in future elections provided that the DNVP included a 'white-collar employee' in its list.⁶² This conversation totally contradicts the image of Harrer as a cautious person merely interested in being a member of a political sect that Hitler later tried to convey.⁶³ Almost certainly Hitler's engagement in a public conflict with the party chairman was primarily because he was determined to maintain the independence of the DAP and, unlike Harrer, was unwilling to cooperate with a powerful partner. His determination not to be forced into a right-wing 'united front' was to be a leitmotif of Hitler's future policy.

At the beginning of December 1919, Hitler pushed through new rules of procedure for the party, according to which an already existing six-man committee, which contained Drexler, Harrer, two secretaries, and two treasurers, but not Hitler, should take over the actual running of the party. According to a commentary on the rules, composed by Hitler, the aim of the change was to exclude any 'paternalistic form of control' by a 'superior or co-existing authority', by which was meant Harrer's original 'Workers' Political Circle'.⁶⁴ Under pressure, Harrer resigned as party chairman at the beginning of January 1920 and disappeared from the political stage. He was succeeded by Drexler.⁶⁵

The DAP was able to acquire much larger audiences after February 1920 not, as Hitler insisted on maintaining,⁶⁶ because Harrer was no longer blocking the way, but as a result of close cooperation with the Schutz- und Trutzbund or, to put it more accurately, through its patronage. For the DAP was only able significantly to increase its audiences within the context of the anti-Semitic mass meetings organized by the Bund at the beginning of 1920. The first mass public meeting organized by the Schutz- und Trutzbund took place on 7 January 1920 in the Kindl-Keller beer hall in Munich. Kurt Kerlen, the secretary of the North Bavarian Schutz- und Trutzbund, was the main speaker before an audience of 7,000; Feder, Sesselmann, and Hitler were among those who spoke in the discussion. Hitler made a strong anti-Semitic statement. While a general ban on public meetings in Munich was imposed from 12 January to 9 February, the Bund continued its agitation in membership meetings and then went public again with two mass meetings on 19 and 21 February 1920. This exceptionally successful series of mass meetings represents the breakthrough for anti-Semitism as a mass

movement in Munich.⁶⁷ The seed that the Schutz- und Trutzbund had sown in the second half of 1919 with its massive anti-Semitic agitation had now germinated and the Nazis would by and large be the ones to harvest its fruits.

It was in the heated atmosphere of these February days that the DAP took the plunge and held its first meeting in front of a large audience.⁶⁸ Around 2,000 people turned up at the Hofbräuhaus beer cellar on 24 February. The main attraction was a speech by the well-known völkisch speaker and doctor, Johann Dingfelder.⁶⁹ After his speech Hitler read out and explained the new party programme he had produced together with Drexler⁷⁰ and which the already excited audience now confirmed point by point through acclamation. Moreover, at this meeting the DAP was renamed the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei [National Socialist German Workers' Party: NSDAP]. From now onwards, 24 February 1920 was regarded as the official date of the Party's foundation.

The programme reflected contemporary völkisch demands.⁷¹ The Party was committed to the 'union of all Germans' in a 'Greater Germany'; it demanded the suspension of the peace treaties signed in Versailles and St Germain; and it demanded colonies. Jews should be excluded from German citizenship since they were not 'of German blood' and so were not 'national comrades'. A close reading of the programme shows that a considerable number of demands were clearly anti-Semitic, even if, taken literally, some of them were aimed only at 'non-Germans'. As 'guests' in the Reich they were to be subject to 'aliens' legislation' and were not permitted to hold any public office; if there was insufficient food they were to be deported. Moreover, all non-Germans who had entered the Reich since the start of the war were to be forced to leave, a demand that was aimed at the so-called 'Eastern Jews'. As a matter of principle, only Germans could become journalists and publishers. The economic demands also had anti-Semitic implications, indeed they can only be understood in the context of völkisch polemics against allegedly 'Jewish capitalism' and 'Jewish war profiteers'. The Party demanded the 'abolition of income not earned by work', the 'breaking of interest slavery' and the 'confiscation of all war profits'. It demanded profit sharing in all large enterprises, the 'communalization of large department stores' and their lease at a cheap rate to small traders, the abolition of 'speculation in land', the death penalty for 'common criminals, usurers, profiteers etc.'. There followed general statements of social policy such as the demand for an improvement in provision for old age, for the expansion

of the 'whole education system' and the 'improvement of public health'. A specific commitment was made to 'positive Christianity', including a polemic against the 'Jewish materialist spirit'.⁷²

Thus, at the time of its first mass meeting, the NSDAP was operating as part of a wider *völkisch* network. Indeed, in spring 1920, together with fourteen other extreme right-wing groups in Munich, it formed a German-Völkisch Working Group, which included, among others, the Pan-German League, the Thule Society, the German Socialists, the *Deutschnationale Handlungsgehilfenverband* [a white-collar trade union], and the *Deutsch-völkische Schutz- und Trutzbund*.⁷³

The Kapp putsch and the Emergence of Bavaria as a 'Cell of Order'

On 13 March 1920, a group of right-wing conservative politicians and army officers attempted a putsch or coup against the constitutional government in Berlin. They were aided by Free Corps units, whose existence was being threatened by Allied demands for a reduction in the German armed forces. The two main organizers of the putsch, who had won the support of the former Quartermaster General of the old imperial army, Erich Ludendorff, were Wolfgang Kapp, the director of the East Prussian *Landschaft*, a public corporation providing credit to the landed nobility, and Walther Freiherr von Lüttwitz, the former commander of the *Reichswehr* units in Berlin, who had just been relieved of his command. The putsch collapsed after only a few days as a result of a general strike in Berlin during which civil servants refused to obey the new 'government' under its self-appointed 'Reich Chancellor' Kapp, while the conservative establishment, although sympathizing with the coup, for tactical reasons remained aloof from it. The putsch did, however, lead to a change of government and (one of the key demands of the plotters) a general election.⁷⁴

On 16 March, Eckart, a long-time supporter of Kapp,⁷⁵ acting under instructions from Mayr, who was also a political ally of Kapp,⁷⁶ flew to Berlin in order to make contact with the right-wing putschists. He was accompanied by Hitler and they both travelled in a plane supplied by the *Reichswehr*. (The pilot was Lieutenant Robert Ritter von Greim, whom twenty-five years later Hitler was to appoint as his last commander-in-chief of the *Luftwaffe*.) However, by this time the affair was hopeless and, on

18 March, the two emissaries returned to Munich without having achieved anything.⁷⁷

Although the Kapp putsch had failed at Reich level, in Bavaria it resulted in a further shift to the right: The commanders of the *Einwohnerwehren* [home guard], the police president of Munich, Ernst Poehner, and the provincial governor of Upper Bavaria, Gustav von Kahr, pressured the commander of the *Reichswehr* units stationed in Bavaria, Arnold von Mohl, to declare a state of emergency, allegedly in order to prevent the putsch from reaching Bavaria. The Social Democrat Prime Minister, Johannes Hoffmann, then resigned, making way for a new cabinet under the right-wing Conservative, von Kahr. His government was subsequently confirmed in office in the state elections of June 1920.⁷⁸

Kahr took a strongly anti-Semitic, anti-Socialist and anti-Reich government line and the political radicalization that had gripped Bavaria in 1918/1919, intensified. Under Kahr Bavaria became a 'cell of order' [*Ordnungszelle*], in other words the nucleus of a new 'regime of order' directed against the Left and against democratic ideas, and intended to 'restore to health' the whole Reich. Through the close cooperation of the army, the police, the administration, and the judiciary, and protected by the continuing state of emergency, Bavaria became a secure base and assembly point for right-wing extremists and anti-Republican elements. Thus, after the failure of the Kapp putsch, Ludendorff, in particular, the most important figure in the anti-Republican-völkisch scene, moved from Berlin to Munich, taking a whole crowd of assistants and supporters with him. From his new base he attempted to spin a web of contacts among nationalist forces in Austria, Hungary, and elsewhere, in order to establish a 'White International' with the aim of overthrowing the post-war order created by the Allies and radically reshaping the map of Europe. Finally, with the aid of his new allies and the Russian emigrés in Munich, he planned to overthrow the Bolshevik regime in Russia.⁷⁹ Captain Hermann Ehrhardt, the commander of Naval Brigade II, the core unit involved in the Kapp putsch, and his staff set up the headquarters of the *Organisation Consul* in Munich. This was a secret organization, which, among other things, planned the assassination of leading democratic politicians and, despite the existence of a warrant for Ehrhardt's arrest, was under the protection of Munich police headquarters. Thus, the völkisch-right-wing extremist scene in Munich was greatly strengthened, receiving even more support from state agencies and right-wing conservative organizations than hitherto. Not only that: right-wing establishment

conservatives and right-wing extremists moved much closer together. The reduction of politics to a friend–enemy mindset, the permanent threat of violence against political opponents, and the militarization of politics, all of which were being practised in the Ordnungszelle, contributed greatly to this development.⁸⁰

The Kahr government received significant support from the Bavarian Order Bloc,⁸¹ which was established after the Kapp putsch as the ‘union of all patriotically-minded German elements on the basis of the idea of the Reich as a federal state and of a Christian–German–völkisch world view’.⁸² The Bloc operated as an umbrella organization for roughly forty organizations, including the Pan-German League, the Bayerische Heimat- und Königsbund, the Bund Bayern und Reich, and the NSDAP. The Order Bloc sought to win over the public with mass meetings, leaflets, and pamphlets and, from summer 1920 onwards, was chaired by Paul Tafel, an early supporter of the DAP.

However, the most important basis for the Kahr regime was probably provided by the ‘self-defence’ organizations, which had been established throughout the Reich during the revolutionary period and which, in the case of Bavaria, were represented by the very tightly organized Einwohnerwehren, now with some 300,000 members. They served not only as an instrument for maintaining order, but also as a military reserve in the event of war. This meant that they were bound to raise suspicions among the Allies. When, in March 1920, the Allies demanded the disbanding of the self-defence organizations within four weeks, the Reich government initially adopted delaying tactics, but then agreed to their abolition. Kahr, however, was determined to oppose this. The conflict between the Bavarian government, the Reich government, and the Entente lasted a whole year until finally, in June 1921, the Allies issued an ultimatum forcing Bavaria to disband the paramilitary organizations. This represented a major defeat for Kahr, from which radical forces such as the NSDAP, demanding a hard line on the matter, were to profit. Hitler described the disarming as ‘self-emasculation’ and equated it to the ‘start of the Jewish dictatorship’.⁸³

This example shows that the political atmosphere in Kahr’s cell of order provided the NSDAP with excellent opportunities to progress. Apart from their receiving crucial support from various quarters – we shall look at this in detail – the fact that Kahr’s policies were addressing precisely the same issues on which Hitler and the NSDAP were concentrating proved exceptionally advantageous for the Party: much of what the Party was demanding

seemed to be being legitimized by the Bavarian government's own policies, but with the NSDAP pursuing them more systematically.

Propaganda for the NSDAP

Between the 'founding meeting' of the NSDAP in February 1920 and the end of the year Hitler spoke at over sixty meetings, most of them in Munich; he was the Party speaker who was most in demand. In September and October he was involved in an election campaign in Austria; apart from that, he spoke a dozen times outside the state capital.⁸⁴

The topics that Hitler addressed in these speeches, usually in front of several hundred, occasionally a crowd of several thousand people,⁸⁵ were always the same: usually he began with a comparison between Germany's pre-war position and the current unenviable one, which he described as dramatically as possible; he dealt in detail with the origins of the war (for which he blamed the Allies), with the defeat and the revolution, with the injustice of the Versailles Treaty and the government's helplessness when faced with the humiliations imposed by the victors. The blame for all of this lay primarily with the Jews. Inspired by Feder's criticism of 'finance capital', Hitler attacked 'international Jewish big capital',⁸⁶ which was directing the Allied war policies, and the Jewish 'black marketeers' and 'profiteers',⁸⁷ who were mainly responsible for the economic distress and, moreover, were dividing the fatherland and dragging it ever deeper into the abyss.⁸⁸

During these speeches, Hitler kept emphasizing the unbridgeable differences that existed between Germany and the western powers, dominated as they were by 'the Jews'. France was the 'hereditary enemy',⁸⁹ but at this time Britain too was for him an 'absolute opponent'.⁹⁰ 'It's Britain that's mainly to blame for wars,' he exclaimed in June 1920.⁹¹ This assessment prompted the notion of seeking close cooperation with Russia, but a Russia that had been liberated from 'Jewish Bolshevism'. This idea appeared in several of Hitler's speeches in the summer of 1920, for example in a speech in Rosenheim in July: 'Our salvation will never come from the West. We must seek contact with nationalist, anti-Semitic Russia, but not with the Soviets.'⁹² This theme came up in his speeches until spring 1922. It was due not least to the influence of the Baltic German emigrés (of whom there were a considerable number in Munich) associated with Alfred Rosenberg and Max Erwin von Scheubner-Richter, a subject to which we shall return.⁹³

In addition to 'international Jewish big capital', from spring 1920 onwards, Hitler increasingly emphasized⁹⁴ the 'Jewish' character of Russian 'Bolshevism',⁹⁵ at the same time positing the German and international labour movements as instruments of a Jewish conspiracy.⁹⁶ Indeed, these tropes gave him the great leitmotif that increasingly shaped his speeches from summer 1920 onwards: the 'Jewish question' as the key to understanding Germany's international situation and its domestic and economic plight.⁹⁷ It is clear that, in developing his by now multifaceted anti-Semitic world view, he had borrowed ideas from his mentor Eckart, an 'educated' anti-Semite.⁹⁸ Thus, on 13 August 1920, in a three-hour speech in the Hofbräuhaus, Hitler was ready to present his anti-Semitic prejudices as an apparently coherent 'theory', one that was dotted with numerous historical 'facts' and extensive observations on politics, economics, and culture. Jews, according to Hitler, did not generally have a positive attitude to work, had been weakened by centuries of incest, and lacked 'inner spiritual experience'. For these three reasons they were incapable of 'building a state' and, instead, corrupted the existing state structure. To ward off this threat, anti-Semitism, together with Socialism and 'nationalism', formed 'the core elements of our programme'.⁹⁹

But what was this anti-Semitism going to involve? In his speeches he repeatedly rejected pogroms and 'emotional anti-Semitism'.¹⁰⁰ Instead, 'we are imbued with the ruthless determination to get to the root of the evil and exterminate it root and branch'; for this to happen 'we must be willing to use every means, even if we have to be in league with the devil'.¹⁰¹ Again and again such tirades concluded with the demand for the 'removal of the Jews from our nation'.¹⁰² His watchword was: 'Out with the Jews'.¹⁰³ At an international meeting of National Socialists in Salzburg he compared Jews with germs, which were responsible for 'racial tuberculosis' and so must be fought like the causes of an epidemic. 'Jewish activities will never cease and will go on poisoning our nation until the pathogen, the Jew, has been removed from our midst'.¹⁰⁴ A few weeks later, in a speech in Rosenheim he worked himself up into a frenzy of anti-Semitic hatred: 'Jews are the brutal representatives of unearned income', the 'parasites of our economic life', the 'ferment of the moral decomposition of our nation', in short, the 'Jewish swindlers must get out of our nation'.¹⁰⁵

According to the notes and reports of his speeches, they were very warmly received by the majority of the audiences, being met with enthusiastic outbursts and huge applause. There is no doubt that the effect of his

speeches was based on this dialogue with the public, with Hitler often working himself up into tirades lasting several hours; indeed, speeches of two or three hours were not unusual. To achieve an adequate appreciation of the effect of his rhetorical talent one has to imagine the hothouse atmosphere in his meetings; simply reading the notes and reports is not sufficient.

The historian, Karl Alexander von Müller, who in 1919 may have been the first person to become aware of Hitler's rhetorical gifts, described a meeting in the Löwenbräukeller four years later as follows: 'Neither during the war nor during the revolution had I experienced on entering such a scorching breath of hypnotic mass excitement'. People were waiting in tense anticipation and then at last the speaker arrived. 'Everybody jumped up from their seats shouting "Heil" and through the shouting crowds and the streaming flags came the one they were waiting for with his entourage, striding quickly to the podium, with his right arm raised stiffly. He passed by quite close to me and I saw that this was a different person from the one whom I had encountered from time to time 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 enemies to be conquered. Did the crowd give him this mysterious power? Did it flow from him to them?'¹⁰⁶

Writing about one of his visits to an early Nazi Party meeting, the writer, Carl Zuckmayer reported: 'Once I managed to get a seat so close to the podium that I saw the spit spurting out of his mouth. For people like us the man was a howling dervish. But he knew how to rouse and carry away those crowds squashed together under a cloud of tobacco smoke and sausage smells: not through arguments, which during a rabble-rousing speech can never be checked, but through the fanaticism of his performance, the shouting and screaming, combined with his petty bourgeois convictions; above all, however, through the drumming force of repetition in a particular, infectious rhythm.' He succeeded, according to Zuckmayer, 'in putting people into a trance like a primitive tribe's medicine man'.¹⁰⁷

Recalling Hitler's early rhetorical performances, his former sergeant-major, Max Amann, wrote: 'The man screamed, he behaved in a way that I've never seen before. But everyone said: "He really means what he's saying." The sweat ran off him, he was soaking wet, it was incredible and that was what made his reputation...'¹⁰⁸ It was this eccentric style, his almost pitiable quality, his awkwardness, his obvious lack of training, and at the

same time his intensity and ecstatic quality, all of these evidently conveyed to his public an impression of uniqueness and authenticity.

But Hitler was not simply a good speaker, who, as a 'man of the people', could instinctively hit the right note. Rather, his success must also have derived from factors that lay deep in his personality. We have already explored the fact that Hitler experienced the major upheaval of the immediate post-war period – military defeat, revolution, virtual civil war, and the substantial collapse of the economy – as a personal catastrophe. Unlike the majority of his contemporaries, who consigned these events to the abstract sphere of 'politics' and were able to maintain their own private life, in fact could shield themselves from the crisis as far as possible, Hitler lacked this private retreat. While many of his audience, even under the miserable post-war conditions, were able to fall in love, get married, have children, and lead a family life with its ups and downs, enjoy celebrations, and mourn their dead, Hitler felt the defeat and the challenge of the revolution with every nerve in his body as a deep inner wound and personal humiliation. But he was not prepared to confront the real reasons for this catastrophe. He could not admit that the defeat and the subsequent political chaos were self-inflicted, were the result of military weakness or of the illusions under which Germany had been living until the end of the war and which then were so abruptly shattered. He could only come to terms with them if he could regard them as the result of intrigue. And he now believed he could name those behind the scenes who were responsible: the Jews, who had used Socialism for their own ends. As part of this refusal to recognize reality Hitler developed a glorious view of the future; this concealed the miserable reality. He had a utopian vision of a national revival on a grand scale, enabling him to escape the lethargy and depression that had afflicted him in Pasewalk.

This mixture of hurt, blind fury, and a megalomaniacal refusal to accept reality – the expression of his psychological disposition – was evidently essential to his impact as a speaker. Here was someone who was openly displaying to the astonished public how he was struggling to come to terms with his shock at the prevailing conditions. He began hesitantly, with awkward gestures, searching for words. But then he got going, using crude accusations to provide simple explanations, and finally giving hope to his listeners by opening up the prospects of a glorious future. But he gripped his audience above all through the effort that he was clearly putting into it – grimaces, exaggerated gestures, uninhibited bellowing and screaming, interrupted by interludes of sarcasm and irony, the whole performance

producing vast amounts of sweat, running down his face, sticking to his hair, and soaking his clothing.

Hitler had already impressed his friend Kubizek with his endless monologues, with his flight into an imagined world he had talked himself into believing in and which protected him from having to face his emotional inadequacies in dealing with other people. He must have felt the opportunity of speaking for hours on end to mass audiences with which he could establish direct contact, stirring them to enthusiastic applause and deep emotion, to be real compensation for his lack of feeling and inner emptiness. At the same time, this process of transformation that was taking place in front of everybody, the fact that an obviously inhibited person was succeeding, through a close bond with his audience, in rising to an ecstasy of emotion, was what made his speeches so fascinating. For in the intoxication of speaking and thanks to the ecstatic response of his audience, Hitler was reconfiguring reality in his own mind, and this process was an experience many listeners took with them from his speeches.

Because of his success as the most important party speaker Hitler soon acquired the role of the DAP's head of propaganda, a task he accorded the highest priority in the domestic political struggle. What was vital, he wrote in 1921, was to organize 'protest after protest, in beer halls and in the streets'. They must 'inspire a passionate wave of defiance, fury, and bitter anger . . . in our nation'. 'We want to pour hatred, burning hatred into the souls of millions of our national comrades . . .'¹⁰⁹ Hitler assumed that well-thought-out and cleverly delivered propaganda could have an almost unlimited impact. This very much reflected current opinion. In his influential book, *The Psychology of the Masses* (1895), published in German translation in 1908, Gustave Le Bon had effectively outlined how the weak-willed masses could be easily seduced. A similar line was taken in a pamphlet by the Munich neurologist, Julius R. Rossbach, with the title *The Soul of the Masses: Psychological Observations on the Creation of Popular (Mass) Movements (Revolutions)*, which he published in 1919 and which was extensively reviewed by Marc Sesselmann in the *Münchener Beobachter*. Rossbach frequently referred to Le Bon and so the similarity of the views held by Hitler and Le Bon, which has long been remarked upon, may be attributable to this pamphlet.¹¹⁰ It appears entirely plausible that Hitler became acquainted with these ideas in the course of his training to become a propagandist during 1919.¹¹¹

Hitler himself wrote in *Mein Kampf* about the effectiveness of the Christian Social and Social Democratic propaganda in pre-war Austria¹¹²

and, above all, about Allied wartime propaganda, from which he had 'learnt a huge amount'.¹¹³ The propaganda maxims that Hitler developed in this connection reveal his total contempt for the audience he was addressing. Propaganda must 'always speak to the masses. Its intellectual level must be adapted to the least intelligent among those it is addressed to. Thus, the larger the masses it is trying to reach, the lower its purely intellectual level will have to be.'¹¹⁴ In addition to his view of the primitive nature of the masses, he stressed the importance of repetition: 'The masses' receptive ability is only very limited, their intelligence is small, but their memory is very short. As a result of these facts, all effective propaganda must be limited to a few points and use these as slogans until the very last member of the public understands what you want him to understand by your slogan.'¹¹⁵ Propaganda was all about emotion. 'The people in their overwhelming majority are so feminine by nature and attitude that their thoughts and actions are determined far less by sober reasoning than by emotion and feeling. And this sentiment is not complicated but very simple and all of a piece.'¹¹⁶

Propaganda, according to Hitler, must get the masses moving and prepare the ground for 'the organization', indeed it must 'run far in advance of the organization and provide it with the human material to be worked on'.¹¹⁷ As early as 1921, he had written that it was necessary 'to go from house to house in order to build up the organization that will bind together the hundreds of thousands of committed people and so fulfill the deep longings and hopes of the best of our nation'.¹¹⁸ But he was, he wrote in *Mein Kampf*, 'an enemy of organizing too rapidly and too pedantically'.¹¹⁹ In any case, it was important to make a clear distinction between the two tasks. 'Propaganda primes the general public to accept a particular idea and makes it ripe for the victory of this idea, while the organization secures victory by constantly welding those supporters who appear willing and able to carry on the fight for victory into an organic and effective fighting force.'¹²⁰

Hitler noted down this principle in 1925, but he appears to have already been following it right from the start of his political career when he was acting as chief propagandist of the NSDAP. At the beginning of 1921, he had declined an invitation to join a new committee of the Party leadership, a three-man crisis 'Action Committee', which had been confirmed at the membership meeting of the Munich branch in January 1921 on Drexler's initiative.¹²¹ Influencing his decision to reject this offer was not only his conviction that in the early phase of the Party's development propaganda should have priority over organization, but also and above all his awareness

that his talents lay in the field of propaganda, while the essential preconditions for his taking on the Party leadership were lacking.¹²² If he had accepted the chairmanship, he would have had to fit into an already existing structure, take on responsibility, be accountable, regularly take decisions, and in general adopt an orderly life, establish stable personal relations with leading Party figures based on mutual trust, and, not least, listen to others and possibly have to deal with their arguments. But it was impossible for him to reconcile all this with his unstable, restless personality, and irregular way of life. By contrast, producing wonderful visions in mass meetings, announcing apodictic eternal truths in newspaper articles, or addressing the clique of his closest colleagues in endless monologues about everything under the sun – that was the way in which Hitler could cope with his obvious personal flaws.¹²³

The influential German Nationalist journalist, Max Maurenbrecher, wrote a leading article in the *Deutsche Zeitung* on 10 November 1923 as a kind of obituary for the failed putschist, Hitler. In it he remarked that he had had a long conversation with him in May 1921. At that time, Hitler had declared that he was not the ‘leader and statesman’, who could rescue the fatherland, but the ‘agitator’.¹²⁴ In April 1920, Hitler had announced; ‘We need a dictator who is a genius if we are going to rise again’.¹²⁵ In May he demanded that ‘we must acquire a powerful and authoritative government that can ruthlessly clear out the pigsty’.¹²⁶ He complained in January 1921 that there were no men capable of taking on Bismarck’s legacy.¹²⁷ He expressed the hope that ‘one day an iron man will come along, who may have dirty boots but a pure conscience and a steely grip, who will silence these darlings of society and get the nation to act’.¹²⁸ With all these statements he was articulating the yearning for leadership widespread on the right. But he was a long way off putting himself forward as the leader.

3

Hitler becomes Party Leader

The NSDAP was able to build up its organization under the protection of the authoritarian regime in Bavaria. The number of new members increased between January and the end of 1920 from around 200 to over 2,100.¹ The first local branch outside Munich was founded in Rosenheim in April 1920.² By the end of the year it had been followed by Stuttgart, Dortmund, Starnberg, Tegernsee, Landsberg, and Landshut.³ The Party's growth was based among other things on the fact that, during the course of 1920, it succeeded in largely taking over the Schutz- und Trutzbund's mass anti-Semitic agitation. It benefited from virtually the whole of the latter's Munich local branch leadership also being members of the NSDAP. Elsewhere too, new NSDAP local branches often emerged out of branches of the Schutzbund.⁴ Hitler, however, who initially wanted to concentrate activity in Munich, advised caution in the creation of new branches, a policy that the Party duly followed.⁵

In March 1920, Hitler, who had delayed this for as long as possible, was finally discharged from the army. In Mayr's service he had learnt lessons vital for his future political career: to perceive the world in terms of friends and enemies, how to get his way in the face of opposition from his own colleagues, the basic principles of agitation and propaganda, how to secure and cultivate sponsors, and other things besides. Hitler's departure did not affect the army's support for the NSDAP. In June 1920 Mayr paid for 3,000 propaganda pamphlets, published by Lehmann and delivered to the NSDAP⁶ and, after his own discharge from the Reichswehr in July 1920, continued to provide active support.⁷ Thus, in September he told his mentor, Wolfgang Kapp, leader of the failed putsch, who had since been living in exile in Sweden: 'The national workers party must provide the basis for the strong assault force for which we are hoping. It's true that the programme is a bit crude and may also be inadequate. . . . Since July last year I have been doing

my best to encourage the movement. I have mobilized some very effective young people. A certain Herr Hitler, for example, is a dynamic figure, a first class popular speaker.' As the next step Mayr wanted to get hold of the *Münchener Beobachter*, but he needed another 45,000 Marks: 'Could you possibly, Herr Privy Councillor, provide me with a source of funds?'⁸ The Bavarian Army district command also had a benevolent regard for the Party. In December it reported to Berlin that the 'series of meetings held by the National Socialist Workers Party is having a very positive patriotic effect.'⁹

Hitler had been working to take over the *Münchener Beobachter* since the summer. The project had been discussed in the meetings of the NSDAP committee since July and increasingly since November 1920.¹⁰ In December he saw that the chance to act had arrived: during the night of 16/17 December he warned important friends of the Party that there was a threat of the paper falling into the hands of separatists, and during the following days the money was raised for its purchase. Eckart was able to get General von Epp to put up 60,000 RM of Reichswehr funds (for which Eckart acted as guarantor) and Hitler persuaded an Augsburg entrepreneur, Gottfried Grandel, to come up with another 56,000 RM. The shares in the newspaper were formally transferred to Drexler.¹¹

Hitler also sought financial support for the newspaper, which was never profitable, in Berlin. Backed with a letter of recommendation from police president, Pöhner, declaring that he had 'had lengthy conversations with Herr Hitler and become convinced that he is an exceptionally clever and energetic supporter of our cause', Hitler travelled to meet Heinrich Class, the chairman of the Pan-German League, who had previously helped him out. This meeting may have been the result of Mayr's September letter because Class had not gained an especially positive impression of Hitler from previous encounters.¹² After the meeting Class, who was prepared in principle to seek financial support for the *Völkischer Beobachter* because he wanted to acquire a base in Munich, contacted Otto Gertung, chairman of the engineering firm MAN, who initially responded that he would examine the matter in a positive light.¹³ Following a second visit to Class that Hitler made in spring 1921, the former enquired of Tafel whether it was true, as he had been informed, that Hitler was unsettling civil servants and, above all, students with his 'socialist' propaganda.¹⁴ Class remained uncertain.

The Munich police headquarters under its president, Pöhner, and the head of its political department, Wilhelm Frick, had no such qualms. At

Hitler's trial in 1924 Frick stated that he and Pöhner had been supporting the DAP right from the start, as they were convinced 'that this was the movement that would be able to win support from the workers, who had been infected by Marxism, and win them back to the nationalist cause. For this reason we held a protective hand over the National Socialist Party and Herr Hitler.'¹⁵ In particular, the approval of political posters, which was required under the state of emergency, was dealt with in a generous fashion. Kahr had 'quietly tolerated' this policy, he claimed. Hitler subsequently thanked Frick and Pöhner warmly for their support in *Mein Kampf*.¹⁶

Thus, the NSDAP continued its propaganda during 1921, supported and protected in various ways by the right-wing conservative establishment. On 3 February 1921, Hitler spoke for the first time at a meeting in the Circus Krone in front of 6,000 people, ranting for two and a half hours against the Versailles Treaty.¹⁷ With this quickly arranged meeting Hitler had pre-empted a major demonstration planned by the right-wing organizations against the impending agreement by the Reich government to pay a sum of 226 billion gold marks in reparations that had been finally agreed at the Paris Conference. As in the previous year, when he had used the hot-house anti-Semitic atmosphere created by the Schutz- und Trutzbund for the NSDAP's first big meeting in the Hofbräuhaus, now, once again pushing himself into the limelight at just the right moment, he exploited the excitement generated by his political rivals. However, his rivals had their revenge: when Hitler tried to generate support for the NSDAP at the protest demonstration arranged by the patriotic organizations on the Odeonsplatz on 6 February the organizers sabotaged his speech.¹⁸ On 6 and again on 15 March, with Hitler as speaker, the NSDAP succeeded in filling the huge Circus Krone. As usual, he fulminated against 'new humiliations for the German nation' and the 'disgrace of the Versailles treaty'.¹⁹ During the course of 1921, he gave a total of over sixty speeches.²⁰

But who came to these meetings? In contrast to the Party's title it was not so much the workers who joined but rather members of the lower middle class. In July Hitler reluctantly admitted this in a letter to Major Hierl, the city commandant of Munich and a Party sympathizer. In response to the latter's enquiry he remarked: 'Your concern that our meetings are not attended by enough people from the industrial working class is only partially correct. We recognize the difficulty of winning over to us workers who, in some cases, have been members of organizations for decades. The precondition for this was to begin by holding mass meetings in order to

have a propaganda method with which to attract the masses. For workers, as down-to-earth people, will always only respect a movement which presents itself in a way that demands respect. But, to ensure the peaceful running of our meetings we were obliged to appeal to a certain middle class, whose attitudes and feelings we knew were nationalist and some of whom, because of the current miserable state of our parties, are politically homeless. As a result of this our meetings have inevitably been somewhat mixed.²¹

Hitler's entourage

It was not only the NSDAP's propaganda that was aggressive. Responding to the violent style of politics that had emerged during the post-war era, the Nazis set about organizing their own 'protection troop'. The Munich police first became aware in September 1920 that the Nazis had acquired a protection squad. From the end of 1920 this squad called itself the 'Gymnastic and Sports Section'.²²

In the course of this development a group of dubious characters attached themselves to Hitler to take care of his personal protection and used physical violence against his political opponents. The most prominent of these personal bodyguards was Ulrich Graf, born in 1878, and employed in the municipal abattoir. He claimed to have got to know Hitler as early as 1919 and joined the NSDAP at the beginning of 1921. Among his work colleagues he recruited 'eight tough, reliable men' to act as Hitler's 'security service' and himself took on the role, as he later recorded, of 'permanent escort... responsible for the Führer's personal security'.²³ Apart from Graf, there was also Christian Weber, born in 1883, a groom by trade and, during the post-war period, registered in the Munich trade directory as a horse dealer. According to his own statement, he had supported the Party since February 1920 and his main role had been as Hitler's 'muscle'. Weber was notorious for his involvement in a number of violent incidents: before the 1923 putsch he had had 152 court appearances.²⁴ Emil Maurice, born in 1897, a watchmaker's assistant, acted as Hitler's chauffeur from 1921 onwards.²⁵ Gradually, an informal circle within the NSDAP began to form around Hitler, the Party's most important propagandist. For example, in addition to Graf, Weber, and Maurice, and Hitler's earliest supporters, Anton Drexler, Dietrich Eckart, Alfred Rosenberg, and Hermann Esser, Rudolf Hess joined the group. During the war he had been a Lieutenant in the air

force; he was a member of the Thule Society and had been actively involved in the conspiracy against the Räterepublik. He joined the NSDAP in July 1920 and, as he proudly wrote in a letter to his parents, in the late summer he established the Party's first link with Ludendorff. This contact must have led to a meeting between Hitler and the former Quartermaster General in spring 1921.²⁶

Hess was also part of a delegation of Nazis which, headed by Hitler, was received by Kahr for an exchange of views on 14 May 1921. Following this meeting, in an effusive letter to Kahr Hess described Hitler as a man who combined 'a rare sense of what the people are feeling, political instinct, and tremendous will power'.²⁷ Hess was registered as a student at the University and was a kind of private pupil of the former general and honorary professor, Karl Haushofer; at the same time, he was organizing a Nazi student group.²⁸

Alfred Rosenberg established contacts with a number of Baltic German emigrés who supported the Party. Probably his most important contact was Max Scheubner-Richter, who was born in 1884 in Riga. During the war, he had been engaged in military and political activities (among other things for the German eastern High Command's press office) and then in the recruitment of German Free Corps in the Baltic and their campaign against Soviet Russian forces; subsequently, he had taken part in the Kapp putsch and, after its failure, had transferred his activities to Munich. There, in 1920, Scheubner-Richter established the 'Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Vereinigung' (Association for Economic Development), which worked secretly to coordinate the interests of Baltic German and White Russian emigrés with the plans of German right-wing extremists for eastern Europe and for this purpose ran a newspaper agency.

Scheubner-Richter became Ludendorff's eastern Europe expert and close confidant; he joined the NSDAP in November 1920 and, alongside Hess, formed the link between the Party and the former Quartermaster General. He was also important for the Party as a link-man to the circles of monarchist Russian emigrés; it may also have profited from his contacts to industry. Moreover, like Rosenberg, he was a member of the Riga student fraternity, Rubonia, with a branch in Munich, to which other Baltic Germans belonged such as Otto von Kursell, who worked as an illustrator for Nazi publications, and Arno Schickedanz. Both knew Scheubner-Richter from their Riga days and now worked for his Aufbau Association.²⁹ The group round Rosenberg and Scheubner-Richter considered themselves pioneers

in the struggle for a German strategy of using the Baltic as a springboard for an aggressive policy towards the young Soviet Union. They greatly influenced Hitler, in particular with their notion that the Bolshevik revolution was entirely in Jewish hands and must, therefore, be defeated in order to open the door to the East.

The seizure of power in the Party

In summer 1921 Hitler swapped the role of chief propagandist for that of Party leader. This happened at the high point of a crisis, which had broken out concerning a proposed fusion of the NSDAP with its 'sister', the German Socialist Party. Attempts to combine the two parties can be traced back to August 1920, when Hitler and Drexler met with representatives of the DSP in Salzburg and agreed a demarcation of respective 'spheres of authority'; according to this, the NSDAP was supposed to restrict itself to operating in southern Germany.³⁰ However, at the beginning of 1921, the NSDAP leadership told the Austrian Nazis, who had been planning a union of the various national socialist parties, of their reservations about the DSP. In a letter signed by Drexler, but, on the basis of its language almost certainly written by Hitler, they claimed that the DSP was wasting its energies by establishing far too many, ultimately useless, local branches, was sticking to its commitment to the parliamentary system, and failing to recognize the possibilities of mass propaganda such as was being carried out by the NSDAP.³¹ Drexler, however, appeared to be not unsympathetic to this union. In March, at a meeting with representatives of the DSP in Zeitz in Thuringia, and presumably acting on the authority of the majority of the NSDAP leadership, he reached provisional agreement for an amalgamation of the two parties. However, the subsequent negotiations to clinch the deal, held in Munich in April, were blocked by Hitler, who melodramatically threatened to resign if it went through.³²

Only a few months later, the Munich NSDAP leadership renewed its initiative while Hitler was away on a lengthy stay in Berlin during June and July, where among other things he visited Class, in order to tap him for funds for the *Völkischer Beobachter*.³³ They established contact with Otto Dickel, an Augsburg schoolmaster, who had founded yet another völkisch group, the *Deutsche Werkgemeinschaft*.³⁴ After a successful speech by Dickel in Munich, on 10 July, they met with him and the Nuremberg DSP in

Augsburg to explore the possibility of closer cooperation. Hitler, arriving straight from Berlin, turned up at the meeting unexpectedly trying to block the impending cooperation. However, despite his abrupt departure during the negotiations, he was unable to prevent the Munich delegation from agreeing to Dickel's suggestion for loose cooperation in future. On the following day, Hitler announced that he was in fact resigning from the NSDAP.³⁵

Hitler was afraid that cooperation with the DSP would mean the NSDAP giving up its programme and its identity as a 'revolutionary-nationalist' movement hostile to any form parliamentary activity, and that Dickel would take overall control, with the main focus of action shifting to Augsburg.³⁶ This was a particularly sensitive point, as Hitler was strongly in favour of concentrating the Party's activities in the Munich local branch, in other words the area over which he, as the leading propagandist and celebrated speaker, exercised total control. In short, he considered the identity of the NSDAP, which he had been largely responsible for constructing, to be in danger. Whereas hitherto, as the Party's main agitator and policy maker, he had been able to do what he liked, he now feared being bound by an alien structure that he had had no say in shaping. He rebelled against this on the principle of 'all or nothing', deciding, more or less overnight, to alter his previous role in the Party. However, he did not simply seek the post of chairman, for in doing so he would have been simply integrating himself in a different form into structures that he did not control; instead, he went for unlimited, total leadership.³⁷

His threat to abandon his work for the Party was thus not the result of carefully prepared tactical calculation, not merely the pretext or the occasion for what was actually a long-held ambition to secure a dictatorial form of leadership of the Party, but instead a spontaneous reaction that reflected his unstable character, prone as it was to fits of rage and intuitive 'decisions'. For the cooperation with Dickel, which had been agreed behind his back and initiated against his objections, represented for him an intolerable loss of face; he was in danger of suffering a defeat that would destroy his self-image as the 'drummer' for the nationalist cause, admired by his supporters, that he had devoted most of the previous two years to creating. After threatening to resign in the spring he now had to go through with it if he was not to lose credibility. In order to prevent such potential defeats from happening in the future he had to demand a dictatorial form of leadership for himself. From his point of view this was not a triumphal take-over of power in the

Party, but rather a difficult decision that had been forced on him by outside circumstances. Significantly, in *Mein Kampf* Hitler dismisses the dramatic disagreements of summer 1921 in a few sentences. He does not mention his resignation, but writes, in accordance with his dogmatic separation of propaganda and organization, that the time had come when, 'after the slow visible success of propaganda, the organization [had to be] adapted and adjusted' to it.³⁸ Also, the summer crisis played no role in the 'Party legend' that he was to repeat in hundreds of speeches in the future.

After Hitler's threat the Party leadership gave in. Drexler, who involved Eckart as mediator, sought to conciliate Hitler, who, however, imposed conditions on his return to the Party. He demanded the summoning of an extraordinary general meeting at which the following points were to be on the agenda: the resignation and re-election of the Party committee, which was required to elect him 'No. I. Chairman with dictatorial powers', so that he could immediately set up a three-man 'Action Committee' to carry out a 'ruthless purge of the Party'. Secondly, Hitler demanded the 'establishment of the irrevocable principle that the headquarters is and always will be in Munich'. The Party programme and the Party's name should not be altered for an initial period of six years. There was to be no cooperation with the DSP; such groups would have to 'join' the Party. Negotiations with such groups would require his prior personal approval.³⁹ The committee yielded to Hitler. It declared its willingness 'in view of your tremendous knowledge, your services to the movement marked by rare self-sacrifice and carried out in an honorary capacity, your remarkable rhetorical talent' to grant Hitler 'dictatorial powers'.⁴⁰

However, Hitler's internal Party opponents did not remain inactive. They succeeded in excluding Hermann Esser, one of Hitler's closest associates, from the Party and an anonymous pamphlet appeared in which Hitler was accused of having 'brought disunity and division into our ranks at the behest of dubious men acting behind the scenes'.⁴¹ Drexler informed the police that a leaflet announcing a membership meeting on 26 July had not been authorized by the Party leadership, but had been issued by opponents of the Party in Hitler's and Esser's camp who were no longer members of the NSDAP. Drexler explained that there were 'two factions in the Party, which are strongly opposed to one another', namely 'the Hitler one, which wants to achieve the Party's goals in a revolutionary way, possibly using terror, violence and other means', and the 'Drexler line', which wished to 'achieve [its aims] in a legal (sic!), parliamentary way'. Later, Schüssler, the Party manager,

appeared seeking authorization for a poster, which contained an invitation on behalf of the Party leadership to a membership meeting on 29 July. Schüssler remarked on Hitler's opaque sources of finance and made negative comments about his 'protection squad'.⁴²

However, in the end the two rival factions managed to reach an accommodation. The membership meeting called by Hitler's opposition group for 26 July was now used to prepare for what became a demonstration of Party unity three days later.⁴³ At this meeting in the Hofbräuhaus on 29 July, Hitler was able to push through all his demands in front of 554 members of the Party. He had been correct in acting on the assumption that the vast majority of Party members regarded him as the leading figure in the NSDAP and as indispensable, above all because of his impact in the public arena. He had never striven to become Party chairman, indeed had even declined it in the past; but now, Hitler informed the meeting, he no longer felt able to resist the request of his loyal friend, Drexler.⁴⁴ The new Party statutes, carried with only one vote against, consolidated the central role of the Party leader, who in future was no longer answerable to the Party committee but only to the membership meeting. Finally, Hitler was elected Party chairman and Drexler, as Hitler had proposed, elected honorary president for life.⁴⁵

Esser was welcomed back into the Party and made propaganda chief. Schüssler lost his position as Party manager and was replaced by Hitler's former sergeant-major, Max Amann. Christian Weber was given a post in the Party headquarters to support Amann in running the organization.⁴⁶ A new larger Party headquarters was established in a former pub in the Corneliusstrasse; it replaced the room in the Sterneckerbräu pub which had been rented in 1920.⁴⁷ Eckart, who had warned Hitler's critics in the *Völkischer Beobachter* that no one could 'serve a cause in a more selfless, devoted, and honest way than Hitler' but also in no 'more decisive and vigilant'⁴⁸ a way, was appointed editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter*; Rosenberg became his deputy.⁴⁹ Its financing, however, remained uncertain. In accordance with his maxim of concentrating on Munich, in July Hitler had refused a request by the Pan-Germans to extend the activities of the NSDAP into north Germany; as a result Class did not pursue further contact.⁵⁰

Hitler's seizure of power within the Party coincided with a significant development in Bavarian politics. The dissolution of the Einwohnerwehren at the behest of the Allies had heralded the demise of the Kahr government,

for they had been its main basis of support and, with this defeat, the government suffered a serious loss of prestige. Kahr's attempts, immediately after the dissolution of the *Einwohnerwehren*, to try to create a substitute organization led by the governor of the Upper Palatinate and head of the *Einwohnerwehr* state office, Medical Councillor Otto Pittinger, proved only partially successful. For a number of paramilitary leagues declined to join the so-called Pittinger Organization or only did so with reservations. They included *Bund Oberland*, which had emerged from the *Free Corps Oberland*, the *Reichsflagge*, and the *Verband der Vaterländischen Bezirksvereine Münchens* [League of Munich Patriotic District Associations], which former *Einwohnerwehr* members had joined.⁵¹

Against this background of the increasing fragmentation of the paramilitary organizations in Bavaria, the Munich *Reichswehr* command began to show growing interest in the NSDAP's Gymnastic and Sports section, the Party's relatively small protection squad. It appeared suited to producing cadres for a new paramilitary league; assistance for this was to be provided by the illegal *Organisation Consul* led by Captain Ehrhardt. In August 1921, immediately after his seizure of power within the Party, Hitler made an agreement with Ehrhardt to proceed along these lines. As a result, Hitler and the NSDAP were now actively involved in creating a military reserve in Bavaria, giving the Party considerably more influence. It is highly probable that NSDAP member Ernst Röhm, the *Reichswehr* officer responsible for arming the paramilitary leagues, played an important role in arranging this agreement. Indeed, one can go a step further and wonder whether Hitler's success in acquiring a dictatorial position within the Party in summer 1921 was assisted by the *Reichswehr*, which needed a Party chairman who would support its use of the Party for paramilitary purposes. In view of the lack of sources this must remain speculation. What is certain, however, is that the inclusion in the illegal rearmament programme of what would soon acquire the name *Sturmabteilung* (SA), which in November 1921 had a membership of around 300,⁵² represented a further increase in the *Reichswehr's* support for the Party, but also a greater dependence on the military. The creation of his own paramilitary league, however, enabled Hitler to establish links with other paramilitary organizations, namely those that were opposed to Pittinger's semi-state-run umbrella organization, which came into the open in July 1922, now calling itself 'Bayern und Reich'. The constellation that was to lead to the Hitler putsch in November 1923 was already beginning to form.⁵³

Heading for conflict with the Bavarian government

On 26 August 1921, Matthias Erzberger, who had signed the armistice on 11 November 1918 and, as a result, had become a target of criticism for the whole of the Right, was murdered. This act of violence and the subsequent refusal of Kahr's government to apply the national state of emergency that had been declared by Reich President Ebert in the state of Bavaria (where a state of emergency had already been in operation for years), raised the temperature of what was already a tense political atmosphere in Munich still further.⁵⁴ In addition, the population was becoming discontented about the growing inflation, which, in summer 1921 and not for the first time, led to protests against rising prices.⁵⁵ Hitler immediately tried to portray the protests as the result of a 'Jewish swindle' and generally to pour oil onto the flames; Jewish 'crooks' and 'profiteers' were to blame for the 'people's starvation'.⁵⁶

Kahr, who had failed to get his way in his conflict with the Reich, resigned in September as prime minister together with his whole cabinet; the government was taken over by the moderate conservative, Count Lerchenfeld, with a cabinet made up of members of the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), the German Democratic Party (DDP), and the Bavarian Peasant League. The NSDAP could no longer rely on the political support of the government as it had done under Kahr: the Bavarian Middle Party (the Bavarian branch of the DNVP) had left the government; a critic of the NSDAP, the former state secretary, Xaver Schweyer, had become interior minister; the police president, Poehner, had resigned; and the Justice Ministry had been taken over by Lerchenfeld himself.⁵⁷ As a result, Hitler decided to engage in a confrontation with Lerchenfeld; he sensed the opportunity of playing a leading role in the extreme right-wing movement, which was now acting increasingly independently, and began subjecting Lerchenfeld to a series of vicious attacks.⁵⁸ When he also mounted a number of provocations with the aim of drawing attention to himself, the police and judiciary did not stand idly by.

On 14 September Hitler and his supporters attempted to break up a meeting of the Bavarian Peasant League, which the NSDAP regarded as a 'separatist' organization. In the course of the disorder provoked by the NSDAP in the Löwenbräukeller, the chairman of the Peasant League, Otto Ballerstedt and another representative of the League were injured and the

police closed the meeting.⁵⁹ On the following day, the police banned the *Völkischer Beobachter* for two weeks and, a week later, while in the Party's headquarters, Hitler was taken into custody for a short time and his flat searched.⁶⁰ After further disorder, unauthorized demonstrations, and violent clashes between Nazis and the police during October 1921, Hitler was ordered to attend police headquarters. He was accused of causing massive public disorder and, in the event of a repetition, threatened with deportation.⁶¹ Hitler, of course, claimed to have had nothing to do with these events and declared his willingness to do his utmost to prevent such things from happening in the future. In fact, on the following day, he did warn the SA at a meeting to exercise more discipline: 'we mustn't ruin things with the police'. But he obviously made this declaration in order to reassure the security forces.⁶² However, just over a week later, there was a further incident: on 4 November his SA beat up hecklers at a meeting in the Hofbräuhaus where he was speaking, an event that Hitler described in suitably dramatic terms as the SA's 'baptism of fire'.⁶³

In November the Munich police produced a list of the numerous occasions on which, during the previous months, it had banned Nazi leaflets and posters.⁶⁴ In January 1922 a Munich court sentenced Hitler to three months imprisonment for the attack on Ballerstedt and, during the summer, he spent five weeks in Munich-Stadelheim prison. Hitler never forgave his opponent for the humiliation of his imprisonment; on 30 June 1934, Ballerstedt was murdered near Dachau concentration camp. More than twenty years after his dispute with the leader of the Peasant League Hitler was still maintaining that he had been 'his biggest opponent' and had deployed a 'diabolical sophistry'.⁶⁵ Unlike his stay in Landsberg prison in 1924, Hitler seldom referred to his Munich prison sentence in later years.

After he had been sentenced, Interior Minister Schweyer contemplated Hitler's deportation, but, following vigorous protests from the moderate Right, it did not happen.⁶⁶ Hitler was not going to let the opportunity slip and, on 12 April, took two pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter* to respond to the plan to deport him. He wrote that he felt himself to be a German citizen, although 'according to the letter of the current Jewish law [I am] in fact a "foreigner"'. This was because of 'my blood link to our nation', 'my clan link to Bavaria' (his birthplace, Braunau, belonged to Bavaria until 1816), as well as 'above all the service that I performed for nearly six years in that grey uniform, which in the old days was honoured as the king's uniform and seemed to me at any rate the noblest uniform a citizen can wear'. Hitler

maintained that the case against him had only been brought to create an opportunity to deport him and went on to attack Lerchenfeld, whom in future he referred to ironically as 'Herr Count'.

Only two weeks after Hitler's sentence for his attack on Ballerstedt, the NSDAP held a general membership meeting in Munich from 29 to 31 January 1922, attended by around 1,500 people in the Hofbräuhaus. Hitler greeted delegations from, among other places, Hanover, Leipzig, Halle, Zwickau, Stuttgart, Mannheim, and Nuremberg as well as from a number of Bavarian local branches.⁶⁷ According to figures that he announced at the meeting, at this point the Party had '35 well-organized local branches'.⁶⁸ In fact there were fewer than twenty active ones. The numbers had stagnated following Hitler's take-over of the Party in July 1921, reflecting Hitler's basic principle of concentrating on building up the Party in Munich.⁶⁹ This was in fact where most of the members were registered. The number of members had doubled during the course of 1921 from 2,000 to 4,000.⁷⁰

In an article published in the *Völkischer Beobachter* to coincide with the Party meeting Hitler regaled his readers once again with his favourite topic, the history of the Party, although it was only three years old. His contribution contained a reckoning with his internal Party opponents during the summer crisis in which he once again emphasized the importance of Munich as 'the bastion of the national socialist movement', as the 'model . . . school, but also granite base'. He expressed the hope that one or two of those who had come to the meeting would see beyond the 'grumbling, complaining, slandering, and back-biting' and be convinced that the headquarters had 'carried out a terrific amount of work, which should give us in Munich the right to carry on and direct the organization of our movement'.⁷¹

The meeting itself was exceptionally peaceful. After the conclusion of the usual formalities, Hitler was once again elected chairman with Oskar Körner his deputy. Together with the two secretaries and treasurers, they formed the Party's 'main committee'.⁷²

Looking for donors in Berlin and Munich

In December 1921 Hitler had another meeting in Berlin with Class, the chairman of the Pan-German League, the secretary, Leopold von Vietinghoff-Scheel, and with the executive chairman of the Vereinigte Vaterländische

Verbände [Union of Patriotic Leagues], Fritz Geisler.⁷³ They met in the exclusive National Club of 1919, which was associated with the DNVP. A few months later, on 29 May and 5 June 1922, Hitler was permitted to speak there in front of a large audience. These occasions were largely the result of invitations from Class, who was once again acting as Hitler's mentor in the hope of establishing a base in Munich and subordinating him to Berlin. He even paid his travel expenses.⁷⁴

During 1922–23, an important role in securing Party donations was played by a Berlin pharmacist, Dr Emil Gansser. A friend of Eckart's and a Party supporter, Gansser would invite potential donors to a confidential meeting at which they were addressed by Hitler.⁷⁵ In his speech of 29 May Hitler emphasized that, while there was a certain amount of agreement with the right-wing parties about 'the nationalist aim of liberating Germany', when it came to winning over the workers they were totally incapable of 'competing' with the 'Marxist parties'. He insisted: 'We can only win power and revive Germany on a completely new social and political foundation, not in parliament and on a democratic basis, but only through the violent assertion of our healthy national energies and by bringing together and preparing our youth for this task'. A nationalist dictatorship must then reorganize Germany's political, economic and social constitution, excluding the fateful influence of Jews, Freemasons, and political Catholicism. In contrast to the other right-wing parties, he claimed the NSDAP was free from their influence.⁷⁶ His second speech, which took a similar line to the first, was attended by the influential industrialist, Ernst von Borsig, who subsequently arranged a meeting with Hitler designed to provide him with the financial means to expand his party into north Germany. Given his commitment to concentrating on Munich and Bavaria, Hitler's response was no doubt ambivalent. Borsig was supported in his efforts by Karl Burhenne, the administrator of the Siemens social fund, who had already been introduced to Hitler by Gansser in March 1922. Burhenne also had a meeting with Hitler and, after the meeting, Gansser strongly recommended further support for Hitler.⁷⁷ Borsig and Burhenne then tried to drum up donations for Hitler among Berlin industrialists, evidently to little effect.⁷⁸ However, in summer 1922, Class appears to have transferred 150,000 RM to the NSDAP.⁷⁹

His speeches in the National Club had also opened the doors of the Bavarian Industrialists' Association to Hitler, a contact that was arranged through Hermann Aust, the managing director of a Munich company, who had attended them. Subsequently, Hitler had two meetings with representatives

of the association and gave a speech to a large audience at the Munich Merchants' Club. Aust declared at Hitler's trial in 1924 that he had transferred several donations from businessmen to Hitler.⁸⁰

On 12 October Hitler was once again in Berlin, as is clear from Nazi records that state he had talks with 'north German nationalist circles', in particular with the Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände, the Stahlhelm [Steel Helmet] veterans' organization, the Deutsche Handlungsgehilfenverband [a white-collar union] and the Deutschbund.⁸¹ A few days after his stay, he penned a memorandum on the 'Expansion of the National Socialist Workers' Party', which was obviously intended for potential donors. It stated that the main aim of the NSDAP was 'the annihilation and extermination of the Marxist world view' to be achieved through an 'incomparable, brilliantly organized propaganda and indoctrination machine' and through an 'organization marked by the most ruthless force and the most brutal determination' (i.e. the SA). In other words, Hitler was once again adopting his distinction in principle between 'propaganda' and 'organization'. Spelled out in concrete terms, he wanted to turn the *Völkischer Beobachter* into a daily paper, improve the equipment of and partly motorize the SA, and acquire a new headquarters. In total, he worked out, he needed the sum of 53,240,000 RM (equivalent to 95,000 pre-war Marks).⁸²

We do not know whether or from whom Hitler received such a substantial sum; in practice, however, his wishes were largely fulfilled. In autumn 1922 the Party acquired three vehicles, a motor car – an open-topped, four-seater touring car, a Selve – for Hitler's personal use, as well as two lorries (provided by a Reichswehr cover organization under Röhm's control) for transporting Party members.⁸³ From February 1923 onwards the *Völkischer Beobachter* appeared as a daily. During the summer of 1923, the Party headquarters moved into rooms belonging to the *Völkischer Beobachter* in Schellingstrasse 39/41 and, shortly afterwards, Hitler was already inspecting Schellingstrasse 50. The Party did not, however, open its new headquarters here until 1925, on account of the ban on the Party following the failed putsch of November 1923.⁸⁴

Even after his take-over of power in the Party and receiving increasing support from the upper classes, Hitler's personal circumstances remained demonstratively modest. He lived in a furnished room in Thierschstrasse and most of the time wore shabby suits.⁸⁵ His irregular, bohemian life style, his frequent and lengthy visits to cafés, where he surrounded himself with strikingly mixed company – his entourage – aroused the mistrust of both

internal and external opponents. What was Hitler living off? they were asking, now that he had been discharged from the Reichswehr. He was being called the 'King of Munich', an image that Hitler 'did not particularly want to go into'.⁸⁶ His opaque financial circumstances had already become an issue during the 1921 summer crisis.⁸⁷ He declared that he did not receive any fees for his speeches for the Party, but was supported 'in a modest way' by Party members; apart from that, he lived off his income as an 'author'. That can really only refer to his regular articles in the *Völkischer Beobachter*, for which he presumably received payment. In addition, he may have received fees for occasional speeches unconnected with the NSDAP.⁸⁸ It is plausible that he personally received money from one or more Party donors (who hoped thereby to acquire influence), but this cannot be proved.

4

The March to the Hitler Putsch

In summer 1922 the conflict between Bavaria and the Reich broke out again with renewed bitterness. The murder of Reich Foreign Minister, Walther Rathenau by members of the Organization Consul, on 24 June 1922, prompted the Reich to pass a 'Law for the Protection of the Republic', which seriously impinged on the responsibilities of the federal states. The Bavarian government responded by replacing the Reich law with a state decree, whereupon the Reich President demanded the withdrawal of the decree. When Prime Minister Lerchenfeld subsequently worked out a compromise with the Reich and, in August, finally withdrew the decree, he found himself confronted with a broad front of right-wing groups accusing him of having sacrificed Bavarian interests. Anti-Prussian and anti-socialist sentiments were being exploited once again.¹ During the following months Hitler was able to profit from these bitter conflicts.

The agitation against the Reich government and Lerchenfeld's policy came to a head on 16 August with a major demonstration of the right-wing leagues on the Königsplatz in Munich. The NSDAP took part in this event as a distinct formation, with Hitler, the second speaker, receiving warm applause from the crowd.²

Another major demonstration, arranged for only a few days later, was banned by the police because of rumours about a putsch. In fact, Pittinger, who was trying to unite the most important paramilitary leagues under the umbrella of his organization Bayern und Reich, wanted to use this opportunity to proclaim Kahr dictator. However, Georg Heim, the Bavarian peasant leader, as well as a number of Reichswehr officers who were in the know, refused to join in prompting Pittinger to approach Hitler. In the event, relatively few demonstrators came to the Königsplatz (most of them

were Nazis) and the police cleared the square, forcing Pittinger to cancel the operation.³ Finally, instead of the demonstration taking place on the Königsplatz, around 5,000 demonstrators made their way to the Kindlkeller, where Hitler found he had no alternative but to follow police instructions and order his followers peacefully to disperse. The evening had turned into a fiasco for Hitler. One thing had become clear: the more the NSDAP became involved in the complicated relationship between government, army, and paramilitary leagues, the greater the danger of being used by others for their own purposes.⁴ Hitler interpreted the botched 'Pittinger putsch' as confirmation of his previous policy of maintaining the NSDAP's independence at all costs.

These highly fraught political confrontations were taking place against the background of an increasingly precarious economic situation brought about by the rapid devaluation of the currency. For during the summer of 1922 the steady deterioration in the value of the Mark that had been going on since the war turned into hyperinflation. A memorandum from the Bavarian state government to the Reich Chancellor from September 1922 stated: 'The wave of price increases that is currently sweeping through the country, which in size and extent far exceeds all previous ones, has created a situation that poses a threat to the economy, to the state, and to society in equal measure.'⁵

In October 1922, Hitler accepted an invitation from the Schutz- und Trutzbund for his Party to attend the German Day in Coburg, a gathering of völkisch supporters from all over the Reich. It was the first time that Hitler had mobilized his Party supporters in any numbers for an event outside Munich. It is claimed that 800 SA men travelled on 14 October to the town in Upper Franconia in northern Bavaria. Despite a police ban, they marched through the town in tight formation with flags flying and a band playing. The provocation had the desired effect. There were numerous fights with socialist counter-demonstrators, culminating in a street battle. By the end, the SA had provided an exemplary demonstration of how to conquer the streets.⁶ A few days later, Hitler achieved another triumph, this time in Middle Franconia. On 20 October, the members of the Nuremberg branch of the Deutsche Werkgemeinschaft (mainly previous supporters of the DSP) were ceremoniously received into the NSDAP. At the beginning of the month, after a row with Otto Dickel, the founder and leader of the Werkgemeinschaft, the branch leader, Julius Streicher, who was a school teacher and rabid anti-Semite, had agreed to throw in his lot with Hitler.

The fact that the Munich Party was prepared to take on his newspaper, the *Deutscher Volkswille*, and pay off its debts, which were in his name, provided an additional incentive. By the end of 1922, the march through Coburg and Streicher's joining the NSDAP with his supporters had significantly increased the Party's support in Middle and Upper Franconia.⁷

In total, by the end of 1922, 8,000 people had joined the Party since its foundation, of whom half had joined during the second half of 1922, although, in view of the high degree of fluctuation, the actual number of members was probably significantly lower.⁸ Moreover, the number of local branches had markedly increased. Their number rose from 17 at the beginning of 1922 to 46 by the end of the summer and, finally, to 100 at the end of the year. This also shows that the NSDAP's expansion occurred mostly during the last months of 1922.⁹ The main focus of the Party organization continued to be Bavaria, where its presence could no longer be ignored. Whereas the NSDAP was banned in Prussia in November 1922, the political situation in Bavaria moved in the Party's favour. Lerchenfeld was replaced as prime minister in November, and his successor, Eugen von Knilling, who was a right-wing conservative, once more tried to link the extreme right-wing forces more closely to the government. Knilling's attitude to the NSDAP was ambivalent. He tried to limit its extremism, but believed the Party's potential could be utilized for a nationalist initiative coming from Bavaria. Thus, in November, only a few days after Knilling's arrival in office, the NSDAP was included in the re-founded Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände, a relatively broad umbrella organization, containing both civilian and paramilitary, moderate and radical right-wing groups. Apart from the Nazis, it included Pittinger's Bayern und Reich, the Bayerische Ordnungsblock, the Wehrverband Reichsflagge, the Verband der Vaterländischen Bezirksvereine Münchens as well as the Pan-German League and the Schutz- und Trutzbund.¹⁰

At the same time, the Party demonstrated that it was quite capable of acting on its own. In November 1922, rumours were circulating that Hitler was planning a putsch, rumours that increased during January.¹¹ They seemed to be entirely justified by the NSDAP's aggressive behaviour, for, before the end of the year, the SA engaged for a second time in a massive operation outside Munich. In December 1922 a large group of SA men turned up in Göppingen in Württemberg and engaged in a bloody confrontation with socialist opponents.¹² Moreover, on 13 December, the NSDAP organized ten mass meetings running in parallel in Munich, with the slogan 'Jews and Marxists: the True Gravediggers of the German Nation and the German

Reich'.¹³ A few days later Hitler held an SA parade in the Munich Hofbräuhaus. In front of an audience of – the police estimated – 2,800, Hitler, referring to the violent events in Göppingen, demanded that the SA show 'loyalty unto death and beyond, as the Führer himself also pledges loyalty unto death'.¹⁴

From 'drummer' to 'Führer'

The growth in support for the NSDAP in autumn 1922 marks the point at which the image and self-image of Hitler as 'Führer' began to develop within the Party. During the post-war period, the call for a 'Führer' was common within the German Right, but not only the Right. In politics, literature, journalism, the humanities, the youth movement, and also within the Protestant Church there was a widespread longing for an exceptional personality, the 'one', to appear and lead the nation out of its humiliation and back to honour and national glory. This call from multiple voices was religiously, or rather pseudo-religiously, charged to a high degree. For many this anticipated hero could only be one sent by God. The longing for a national saviour figure was so ubiquitous and so intense that, for many, the numerous prophecies of a messianic redeemer had almost become a certainty.¹⁵

Such expressions of anticipation of a 'Führer' can also be shown to have been present in the milieu within which Hitler gradually emerged as 'Führer' between 1919 and 1923. In September 1919, in other words at the moment when Hitler first attended a DAP meeting, Scheubner-Richter's newsletter, *Aufbau*, published a poem by Emanuel Geibel ('German Laments from the Year 1844'),¹⁶ which contains the following lines:

We need a man, a scion of the Nibelungs,
To take control of our madly galloping age
With iron fists and thighs.

In December 1919, Dietrich Eckart, Hitler's mentor in the DAP, published a poem 'Patience', in which the last verse reads:

He waits silently, the hero to whom we look;
Only now and then the sword clinks in his scabbard,
Then all around, with dreadful groans and howls
That progeny of hell, the Huns.

He waits in silence, his eyes fixed on one object:
 The countless crimes others have committed against us –
 Already a bright dawn seems to be breaking

...
 Patience! Patience!¹⁷

During 1922, Hitler was usually referred to as Adolf Hitler or 'Pg. (Party comrade) Hitler' in the announcements of his speeches in the *Völkischer Beobachter*. From spring 1922 onwards, however, increasingly the term 'our leader Pg. Adolf Hitler' is used. When, at the end of October 1922, the Italian Fascists secured Mussolini's take-over of power with their 'March on Rome' this boosted the NSDAP's prestige among right-wing groups and in particular Hitler's role as political leader. 'What a group of courageous men managed to do in Italy' announced Esser in a speech on 3 November in the Löwenbräukeller, 'we can do in Bavaria as well. We too have Italy's Mussolini. He's called Adolf Hitler'.¹⁸ On 6 December, the *Völkischer Beobachter* wrote about a meeting which had taken place a few days before: 'Wherever Hitler went the cheering went on and on; it was for the man who through his boundless enthusiasm, determination to reach his goals, and uncompromising energy embodies what today millions long for, hope for, and indeed foresee.'¹⁹

At the same time Rudolf Hess gave a boost to the Hitler cult in his own particular way. At the end of 1922, he won a competition organized by the University of Munich for an essay with the title 'What kind of a man will restore Germany to greatness?' Hess's prize-winning essay²⁰ did not name names, but it is clear to whom he is attributing the exceptional abilities he describes. He argued that the 'German dictator' – as far as he was concerned there could be no other title for the future leader – had 'first to reawaken and train up' national consciousness. And he continued: 'Profound knowledge in all areas of the life of the state and of history, and the ability to learn lessons from it, belief in the righteousness of his cause and in final victory, and immense will power will enable him to give thrilling speeches and win the applause of the masses. In order to save the nation he will not shrink from using the weapons of his opponents – demagoguery, slogans, street demonstrations. Where all authority has vanished, popularity is the only source of authority. Mussolini has demonstrated that. The deeper the dictator is rooted in the broad mass of the people, the better he will know how to handle them psychologically. . . . He himself has nothing to do with the masses; he, like every great man, is entirely himself. Through strength of personality he

radiates a certain something, a compelling quality that draws more and more people to him.' Finally, he quoted from a poem by Eckart, published in December 1919:

Storm, storm, storm,
Rings the bell from tower to tower,
Rings for the men, the old ones and young ones,
Awakens the sleepers from their beds,
Rings the serving girls down the narrow staircases,
Rings the mothers away from their cribs.
It must boom and peal through the air,
Rush, rush in the thunder of revenge,
Ringing the dead from their tombs.
Germany awake!²¹

Hess's essay shows that heroic myths and effusive redemption poetry were the ingredients that in undiluted form shaped the image of the future 'Führer' in the eyes of those close to him.

As the Party grew in numbers and prestige, Hitler managed to secure more sources of finance.²² This was vital because, apart from anything else, in 1923 the Reichswehr began increasingly to concentrate on transferring the payments previously made to the NSDAP to the SA.²³

Gansser continued to play an extremely important role in negotiating donations to the NSDAP. In summer 1923, in particular, he secured a loan of 60,000 Swiss francs from Richard Franck, a malt coffee manufacturer, which were used to support the *Völkischer Beobachter*.²⁴ On Hitler's instructions, Amann deposited jewellery in a bank as security. It probably came from Helene Bechstein, who together with her husband Erwin, the piano manufacturer, had already been introduced to Hitler by Eckart in 1920; the couple regularly made contributions to the Party.²⁵ Between April and December 1923, on at least six occasions, Gansser spent lengthy periods in Switzerland, where he secured large donations from sympathizers in Swiss francs, which were much sought after during the hyperinflation. Hitler himself is alleged to have returned from one trip to Switzerland during 1923 with 33,000 francs. Hitler's chauffeur, Julius Schreck, stated after the Munich putsch that his boss had often been paid in Swiss currency.²⁶ Gertrud von Seidlitz, a doctor's widow who joined the NSDAP in 1921 and shortly afterwards got to know Hitler personally, assisted the Party by securing currency from Finland.²⁷ Heinrich Becker, a Swabian underwear manufacturer from Geislingen, was another donor.²⁸



Figure 1. Dietrich Eckart's poem 'Storm' became the inspiration for an early NSDAP anthem. In 1922 Hans Gansser, the brother of the successful fundraiser Emil Gansser, set the poem to music and dedicated it to Adolf Hitler. First performed in 1923 at the first Party Rally, the song later lost its pre-eminence because it was too difficult to sing.

Source: SZ Photo/Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Kurt Lüdecke, a 32 year-old adventurer, globetrotter, and businessman, came into contact with Hitler in summer 1922. He possessed foreign exchange in various denominations, some of which he clearly placed at the disposal of the NSDAP. However, his main role in the Party was to arrange foreign contacts. He claimed to have met Mussolini during 1922, even before the March on Rome, in order to inform him about the NSDAP.²⁹ In 1923 he went on another foreign trip, this time to Budapest and Italy, where he once more visited Mussolini, who had come to power in the meantime. However, according to Lüdecke, the 'Duce' showed no interest in his report on the impending conflicts between Munich and Berlin,³⁰ and Lüdecke's independent actions soon alienated the Party leadership. At the beginning of 1923, following a tip-off from Hitler, the police began investigating Lüdecke on the grounds of espionage.³¹ He was arrested and

held on remand for two months. After his release he continued to work for the Party, but in future Hitler and the Party leadership regarded him with suspicion.³²

Ernst Hanfstängl, a partner in an important fine art publishing house, joined the NSDAP in 1922 following his return to Munich in 1919 after a ten-year stay in the United States. Hitler was a frequent guest in his flat in the bohemian district of Schwabing and, especially during these visits, Hanfstängl was able to provide him with important introductions to the Munich upper-middle class.³³ In 1923 Hanfstängl gave Hitler an interest-free loan of 1,000 dollars that he had acquired from sales in America; during the hyperinflation this represented a serious amount of money and contributed a great deal towards ensuring that, from February 1923 onwards, the *Völkischer Beobachter* could appear as a daily paper. However, Hanfstängl recalled that it proved very difficult to secure the repayment of the loan.³⁴

The rise of the Party ensured that, by the end of 1922, Hitler had gained increased access to Munich high society. He associated with the Hanfstängls, with the Bechsteins, who, during their visits to Munich, stayed in the Hotel Vier Jahreszeiten, and with the Görings (the famous World War fighter ace had moved to Munich at the beginning of 1923). Despite their being impressed by him, many stories were told in these circles about Hitler's lack of social graces, his poor table manners, his unsuitable clothing, his uncivilized behaviour, his impossible taste, and his gauche manner, all of which betrayed his lower-middle-class origins. However, it was precisely this enigmatic aura he conveyed that made him such a social hit. But Hitler's behaviour changed; among other things, his growing success was reflected in his choice of ever more luxurious motorcars. In February 1923 he exchanged the Selve, which had been seriously damaged in an accident, for a larger six-seat car, also a Selve, and in September he treated himself to a shiny red Benz, also a six-seater.³⁵

However, Hitler continued to dress in a style that was, by contemporary standards, eccentric, an eccentricity summed up by the fact that he always carried a riding crop. In 1936 the writer, Friedrich Percyval Reck-Malleczewen, recalling a private visit by Hitler to a cultured family in Munich in 1920, noted that with his 'riding boots, riding crop, Alsatian dog and floppy hat' he had appeared on the scene like a 'cowboy' wanting to take over the conversation and preach 'like a military chaplain'.³⁶ The historian, Karl Alexander von Müller, also reported how, when arriving at a soirée at the Hanfstängls, in the hall Hitler 'had put down his riding crop,

taken off his trench coat and leather hat, and lastly unbuckled a belt with a revolver attached, and then hung them all on a clothes peg. It looked weird and reminiscent of Karl May'.* While at this point Hitler had already had some public success, according to Müller 'there was still something gauche about him and one had the unpleasant feeling that he felt that himself and resented the fact that people noticed it'.³⁷ In his anecdotal memoirs even Hanfstängl cannot help repeatedly commenting with a certain smugness on the contrast between his own cultivated milieu and the shabbily dressed petty bourgeois, Hitler, with his philistine behaviour and lack of education.³⁸ It is no longer possible to check the truth of these anecdotes, but they clearly show that the members of the Munich upper-middle class, who sought to associate with or support Hitler, were also concerned to emphasize their social superiority to this 'phenomenon'.

Around 1922, Hitler's intimate circle was joined by Heinrich Hoffmann, the owner of a Munich photographic studio in Schellingstrasse 50. Hoffmann had been a member of the Party since 1920. The fact that it took two years for him to become closely acquainted with the Party leader was probably for professional reasons: at the start of his career Hitler refused to be photographed. Hoffmann made some attempts to overcome this taboo and gradually, through invitations, lengthy discussions about the artistic interests they had in common and so forth, he managed to win Hitler's trust. In fact, in September 1923, he was permitted to publish the first studio photograph authorized by Hitler and taken only a few days after a press photographer had succeeded in snatching a photo of Hitler at the German Day in Nuremberg. From now onwards, Hoffmann became Hitler's official and exclusive photographer, possessing a monopoly of the pictures authorized by Hitler, and in the process becoming a rich man.³⁹

Hitler's initial refusal to allow himself to be photographed was not, as has been often imagined, one of his clever propaganda ideas to create an aura of mystery around him; the advantages of such a strategy of concealment would undoubtedly have been outweighed by its disadvantages. A more plausible explanation would be that he wanted to remain incognito outside Bavaria in order to avoid the police – on occasions there were arrest warrants out for him – and the attentions of his political opponents.⁴⁰ Hitler's unwillingness to be photographed and his policy, from autumn 1923

* Translators' note: Karl May (1842–1912) was a popular author, known mainly for his Wild West stories, of which Hitler was a fan.

onwards, of controlling published pictures of himself through Hoffmann also point to Hitler's fears that the self-image he had created of a heroic political fighter could be damaged or revealed as a farce by other photographs. For the rest of his life he was haunted by the fear of being made to look ridiculous by unsuitable photographs.⁴¹ Now that he could no longer avoid public interest in how he looked, he ensured that pictures of him were widely distributed in a series of standard poses: holding himself stiffly with a determined, indeed grim facial expression. In later years, Hoffmann and Hitler expanded the repertoire, but this does not alter the basic fact that, with Hoffmann's help, Hitler was himself largely responsible for devising and controlling the image we have of him to this day.

Under Hitler's leadership the rapidly expanding NSDAP remained remarkably unstructured; it developed into a real Führer party, in which Hitler assigned tasks to confidants on an ad hoc basis. He did not have a deputy who could really represent him; there was no executive committee meeting regularly that might have been able to control Hitler; the Party bureaucracy under Amann was intentionally kept weak and had no means of contesting Hitler's claim to absolute power. Hitler was the unchallenged chief propagandist, was in charge of the most important local branch, Munich, and prevented the emergence of any strong Party organization outside Munich from which competition might have arisen. In 1922/23 his informal circle included Amann (Party manager), Rosenberg (editor of the *Völkischer Beobachter* and link man to the Baltic Germans), Esser (propagandist), Scheubner-Richter (link man to Ludendorff), Hanfstängl and Lüdecke with their social contacts, the 'bodyguards' Graf, Weber, and Maurice, although the last two increasingly took on organizational tasks, the two early mentors, Feder and Eckart, and Hoffmann as court photographer. Significantly they did not meet in formal sessions, but mainly in cafés, in Café Heck,⁴² and later in Café Neumayr near the Viktualienmarkt,⁴³ or in Hitler's favourite restaurant, the Ostaria Bavaria in Schellingstrasse.

Membership of this group depended on Hitler's favour, and acquiring and maintaining it required the willing subordination of the person concerned to the Party leader. Anyone who lost Hitler's confidence, such as Eckart and Lüdecke, soon found themselves consigned to the political wilderness. The former had to give up the editorship of the *Völkischer Beobachter* in 1923, presumably because he was not efficient enough. When Hitler's former mentor returned to Munich in October 1923 after six months' absence – he was lying low in Berchtesgaden because of a Reich

arrest warrant – he found that he was completely isolated within the NSDAP and that Hitler no longer consulted him.⁴⁴ The deep ‘friendship’ that Hitler, in later years, repeatedly claimed existed between the two men⁴⁵ did not last.

The SA represented an important exception to this informal structure. It was organized hierarchically along military lines. Its position within the Nazi movement depended not so much on the personal connections of its leaders with Hitler, but rather it was heavily dependent on its links to the Reichswehr and the other paramilitary leagues. Apart from that, as an armed force it represented a power factor *sui generis*, which was to become clear during the turbulent year of 1923.

1923: The crisis year

On 11 January 1923 Belgian and French troops marched into the Ruhr in response to arrears in German reparation payments. The Berlin government replied with a declaration of passive resistance and the growing number of confrontations between the Ruhr population and Belgian and French troops during the following weeks and months produced another serious political crisis. The general outcry of national anger provided further food for Nazi agitation. At the same time, Hitler was fully aware that the new situation also contained risks. For as a result of the NSDAP becoming incorporated into a broad nationalist front – in November 1922 it had already joined the *Vereinigung der Vaterländischen Verbände* – the Party and, in particular, its leader threatened to lose their distinctiveness. From Hitler’s point of view, it was vital for the NSDAP to retain its independence so that he could maintain the role that, over the previous three years, he had established for himself on the Munich political stage. He found a way out by ensuring that the NSDAP did not, like other right-wing groups, direct its agitation against the hated French but instead, in the first instance, against those ‘November criminals in Berlin’, as he put it in a Nazi meeting, who were to blame for Germany’s humiliation. In this way he hoped the NSDAP could use the crisis to sharpen its image. Consequently, he declined to attend a protest meeting intended to unite all the right-wing organizations in a common struggle.⁴⁶

Instead of that, he concentrated on a series of spectacular events with which the NSDAP tried to distinguish itself from the numerous ‘nationalist’

protest rallies. They began at the end of January with the NSDAP's first 'Reich Party Rally'. Originally, the Bavarian government had wanted to limit its scope. In his negotiations with the police chief Hitler began by issuing wild threats: 'The government could shoot them down; he would be in the front row. They could shoot him too, but the one thing he would say was: the first shot would unleash a blood bath and they would see what would happen then: within two hours of the first shot being fired the government would've fallen.'⁴⁷ Two days later, his approach to the police chief was much more restrained; he was humble and in despair. According to his interlocutor, he 'requested on bended knees that no more difficulties be created for him. As a result of the constant changes of decision, his supporters and guests were almost going wild and if the programme were changed it was inevitable that there would be serious and unavoidable repercussions'.⁴⁸ Thus, while acting as supplicant, Hitler was simultaneously making a veiled threat. Finally, prompted by Röhm, the Reichswehr intervened with the Bavarian government and, despite the state of emergency that had been declared in the meantime, secured the removal of the various conditions that had been imposed.⁴⁹ On the evening of 27 January, Hitler made brief appearances at twelve meetings in Munich beer halls⁵⁰ and, the following day, there was a parade of 6,000 SA men on the Marsfeld, where Hitler 'dedicated flags'.⁵¹ Afterwards, the actual meeting of Party delegates took place with 300 chairmen of local branches, followed by a general membership meeting at which Hitler was unanimously confirmed as Party chairman.⁵²

Röhm used the difficulties associated with the Party rally to break with Pittinger's Bayern und Reich, blaming its leader for the restrictions imposed by the government.⁵³ Shortly after this, he founded the Arbeitsgemeinschaft der vaterländischen Kampfverbände [Working Group of Patriot Combat Leagues], to which, apart from the SA, Röhm's own paramilitary league, the Reichsflagge, as well as Bund Oberland, the Vaterländische Vereine Münchens [Patriotic Clubs of Munich], and the Kampfbund Niederbayern [Combat League of Lower Bavaria] all belonged. The Arbeitsgemeinschaft had its own military high command; its members received military training from and were supplied with weapons by the Reichswehr. In setting it up Röhm had brought together the radical völkisch leagues with the clear aim of opposing the moderate conservative Bund Bayern und Reich.⁵⁴ At the same time, Röhm did what he could to protect the NSDAP against unwelcome attentions from the police.⁵⁵

In addition, at the beginning of 1923, the retired Captain Hermann Göring, a highly decorated fighter pilot and former commander of the famous Richthofen squadron, was appointed the new commander of the SA. Göring, who had some private means through his Swedish wife, Carin, and enjoyed a high reputation in nationalist and military circles, interpreted his new role primarily as a representational one. However, many simple Party members took offence at the exaggerated and pompous way in which he performed it.⁵⁶ His villa in Obermenzing became a meeting place for the political Right, and Hitler was often to be found there with his entourage. According to Carin Göring's official biographer, writing in 1934, it was here that, surrounded by the rustic decor of the large basement room, 'after the serious discussions . . . they spent relaxed and enjoyable times together'.⁵⁷ Under Göring's leadership the SA increasingly changed from being a Party strong arm squad to becoming a paramilitary league, with its own high command and military structure, independent of the Party's local branches. In other words, the military wing – Röhm and Göring – were gaining the upper hand within the NSDAP.⁵⁸

On 26 February 1923, Ludendorff called a meeting of the leaders of the important paramilitary leagues in Berlin and demanded their support for the existing government in the event of war. However, they were unwilling to allow their men to be incorporated into the Reichswehr as reservists, insisting that they should only be attached to the army as separate units. Hitler, who also claimed to have been in Berlin at the time, maintained at his 1924 trial that he had been willing to put his men at Ludendorff's disposal.⁵⁹ According to Hitler, in the course of these negotiations there had been a lengthy discussion with the army chief, General Hans von Seeckt, whom he had urged to take military action against the Ruhr occupation – without success.⁶⁰

Shortly afterwards, Röhm's *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* began a campaign of provocation against the Bavarian government by holding big military parades and similar events. On 1 May 1923, the labour movement's traditional annual day of celebration and also the fourth anniversary of the crushing of the Munich *Räterepublik*, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* decided to mount a challenge. Together with the *Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände*, it sent an ultimatum to Prime Minister von Knilling demanding that the planned demonstration by the SPD and the trade unions be banned. When the government refused, the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* assembled thousands of their men in Munich, some of whom had acquired weapons from

Reichswehr stores, despite the fact they were only supposed to receive them in the event of war. However, when the police and the army made it clear that they were not going to back down in the face of the threat, the men returned their weapons and departed. This represented a major loss of prestige for the Arbeitsgemeinschaft and not least for Hitler, whose dependence on the Reichswehr had been clearly exposed.⁶¹ That evening at the Circus Krone Hitler celebrated the 'alliance of defence and defiance' represented by the leagues united in the Arbeitsgemeinschaft, although in fact the Vereinigte Vaterländische Verbände had pulled out at the last minute. But he could not conceal the fact that he had suffered a major defeat.⁶²

Hitler's behaviour had in fact offered the Bavarian judicial authorities the opportunity of starting proceedings against him and revoking the suspension of his three-month prison sentence, of which he had served over a third the previous year. Hitler, however, sent the prosecuting authorities a memorandum in which he threatened to expose the secret cooperation between the Reichswehr and the paramilitary leagues in the event of his being charged. In response, the Bavarian minister of justice decided to postpone the case and it was never proceeded with.⁶³

During the following months, the general crisis worsened. In addition to the nationalist mood stoked by the Ruhr invasion, the hyperinflation, which had been developing since the previous year, induced a sense of deep depression. Large sections of the middle class found their savings being wiped out and unemployment rose dramatically. The number of those in Munich receiving welfare benefits went up from 40,000 at the start of the year to 140,000 at the end.⁶⁴ The widespread hatred of the 'November criminals' was given a further boost not only by the entry of the Social Democrats into the new Reich government formed by Gustav Stresemann in August, but also by the growing cooperation between the SPD governments in Thuringia and Saxony and the Communist Party (KPD); in both states communist ministers joined the government.⁶⁵

In September the SA, Bund Oberland and the Reichsflagge established the Deutscher Kampfbund [German Combat League] at a ceremonial 'German Day' in Nuremberg. This alliance had come about largely through the efforts of Ludendorff, who was to exert considerable influence on the Kampfbund as an eminence grise.⁶⁶ His confidant, Hermann Kriebel, took over the military leadership, while Ludendorff's 'political' advisor 'on the East', Scheubner-Richter, ran the organization. On 27 September, a day after the end of passive resistance in the Ruhr, which produced a further

wave of nationalist anger,⁶⁷ Röhm succeeded in securing the political leadership of the Kampfbund for Hitler and now left the Reichswehr, in order to devote himself full time to the Kampfbund. In fact, it was the military, not Hitler the politician, who were in future to make the decisions about the Kampfbund. Meanwhile, concerned about the situation, the Bavarian government now declared a state of emergency, appointing the former prime minister, Kahr, General State Commissioner, in other words, temporary dictator.⁶⁸

Kahr now tried, on the one hand, to organize a 'coming together of all patriotic forces', and, on the other, to introduce concrete economic measures in order to alleviate the impact of the crisis on the masses.⁶⁹ He fixed bread and beer prices, while attempting to force farmers to make larger deliveries and to reduce the profits of entrepreneurs.⁷⁰ Moreover, as in 1920, he initiated measures to deport eastern Jews, this time with the excuse of combatting 'profiteers' and 'racketeers'. By 1 November 1923, around thirty people had been deported from Munich alone, evidently with the aim of taking the wind out of the sails of the radical anti-Semites and their agitation.⁷¹ Kahr was barely in office when he imposed a ban on all the meetings the NSDAP had planned for 27 September and demanded a declaration of loyalty from the Kampfbund. Hitler responded with the statement that the attitude of the Kampfbund to the General State Commissioner would depend on the attitude that he adopted 'towards the major questions of our time'.⁷²

The appointment of a strong man with populist policies led to a decline in support for the Kampfbund. At the beginning of October, the Reichsflagge declared for Kahr, prompting Röhm to organize the most radical elements in a new league, the Reichskriegsflagge. Since the Reich government had responded to the new Bavarian state of emergency by declaring a Reich-wide state of emergency, the Reichswehr commander in Bavaria, Otto Hermann von Lossow, was placed in a dilemma. When he refused to obey an order from the Reichswehr minister to ban the *Völkischer Beobachter* for an article insulting the Reich Chancellor, he was dismissed. However, the Bavarian government immediately reappointed him as Bavarian state commander, assigning him command of the Reichswehr division stationed in Bavaria.⁷³

This conflict provided the background to the development of a vicious rivalry in Bavaria between the conservative Right and the forces of the radical Right, with the so-called Triumvirate of von Kahr, von Lossow, and Hans

von Seisser, the chief of the state police, on the one side, and Ludendorff, Hitler, and Röhm on the other. They were both totally committed to bringing down the Reich government, but differed over the means of doing so. The Kampfbund wanted to set up a dictatorship in Munich under Ludendorff and Hitler, crush the socialist governments in central Germany, and then stage a 'March on Berlin' in order to seize power in the Reich. Kahr, on the other hand, while wanting to see the Reich government in Berlin replaced by a 'Directorate' with dictatorial powers, aimed to achieve this in the form of a cold coup by working together with right-wing circles in north Germany and the Reichswehr. The aim was to put pressure on the Reich President, who would then use his special powers under Article 48 of the Constitution to establish some form of dictatorship.⁷⁴ In the context of these general preparations for a coup, the Kampfbund was now in danger of simply being used by the Triumvirate. But Hitler was determined to retain his freedom of action; for him retreat was out of the question.

Tension was increased by the fact that the Reichswehr forces stationed in Bavaria and the right-wing leagues in northern Bavaria, supported by the military, were making preparations to mobilize. The state police, which had been reinforced by members of the right-wing leagues, including the Kampfbund and SA, was organizing a 'border defence force' under Captain Erhardt, who was still being sought under a Reich arrest warrant. While the pretext was defence against the left-wing governments in Thuringia and Saxony, the aim of the leagues was to use this force for an impending 'operation' in the north. The Kampfbund and the SA were both taking part in this mobilization.⁷⁵ The Reichswehr's plans were altogether more ambitious, as von Lossow explained to the leagues' leaders at a meeting on 24 October. The plan was to reinforce the Reichswehr units stationed in Bavaria with members of the leagues with the main aim of establishing a 'nationalist dictatorship' in Berlin.⁷⁶ The representatives who were present concurred, although in many cases with the proviso that their members should not be directly integrated into the Reichswehr but retain their independence. Thereupon the Reichswehr began preparing to expand the single division stationed in Bavaria into three divisions. Since the Nazis were not present at this meeting,⁷⁷ they had not issued any statement concerning their participation. However, at the end of October, the Reichswehr began rapidly training the SA in its barracks and, according to Hitler's statements at his 1924 trial, this was with the intention of embarking on a 'military campaign in the north'.⁷⁸

During the following days, there was a series of discussions and soundings between the rival parties, though they had the effect, if anything, of intensifying the differences between their respective objectives. Hitler's most important interlocutors were Lossow and Seisser. On 24 October, when Lossow was meeting the leagues, Hitler subjected Seisser to a four-hour monologue about his aims,⁷⁹ and then, the following day, this time accompanied by Friedrich Weber, the leader of Bund Oberland, once more arranged to meet Seisser, this time together with Lossow. Now he demanded that the planned Reich Directorate should be composed of himself, Ludendorff, Seisser, and Lossow, which Seisser and Lossow both rejected in view of Ludendorff's status.⁸⁰ According to Lossow's statement at the 1924 trial, during this period he had been subjected to a positive 'wave' of visits from Hitler, during which the latter had kept making the same arguments in favour of his plans and had been completely impervious to the objections raised against them.⁸¹ On 25 October, Seisser and Lossow also arranged a meeting between Hitler, Ludendorff, and the industrialist Friedrich Minoux, who had been identified as a potential member of the Directorate; but they were unable to reach agreement on how to alter the political situation in Berlin.⁸²

Lossow's impressions of his meetings with Hitler, which he repeated in the 1924 trial, seem typical of the latter's way of carrying on a conversation and its supposedly grandiose effects. 'Hitler's well-known thrilling and suggestive rhetoric initially had a big effect on me . . . but the more I listened to Hitler . . . the less impressed I became. I noticed that his long speeches almost always made the same points. . . . In general, during such conversations, Hitler is the only one who is allowed to speak. It's difficult to raise objections and they have no effect.' Lossow then referred to a statement by Hitler, according to which the latter claimed that, during one of their conversations, Lossow had been 'very depressed'. Lossow made it clear that his mood had been provoked less by the general political situation and much more by Hitler's endless talking: 'May I be permitted to point out that a different conclusion could be drawn, namely that, having been obliged to listen to these remarks on numerous occasions, General Lossow's patience was more or less exhausted and that, while he did not wish to tell Herr Hitler: "Please, I've had enough!", he did want to indicate that by his demeanour.'⁸³ It is typical of Hitler that he interpreted Lossow's manner, which indicated that Hitler's endless talking had worn him out, as dejection, which he then tried to overcome with another torrent of words. Hitler was unable to recognize

that he was misinterpreting the situation, but instead exerted all his efforts to try to achieve his increasingly unrealistic goals.

The Putsch: Hitler takes on the role of 'Führer'

The tide of events during the crisis-ridden year of 1923 gradually removed Hitler's qualms about taking on the role of 'Führer'.

The NSDAP only became a mass movement in 1923: between January and November around 47,000 new members joined the Party so that, on the eve of the putsch, there were over 55,000 names (including an unknown number of those who had left) on the membership list.⁸⁴ A fragment of the list, containing around 4,800 members who joined between September and November, provides a more detailed picture. More than three-quarters of the new members came from south Germany, although by then the Party was no longer concentrated in Munich itself; only 10 per cent were resident in the Bavarian capital. Analysis shows that the organization benefited above all from expanding into the countryside, particularly in Bavaria. More than half of the new members came from rural districts. Craftsmen, white-collar employees, civil servants, the self-employed, and farmers (over 10 per cent) made up the bulk of the membership and so the Party's profile remained middle-class.⁸⁵

From April 1923 onwards, 'our Führer', became the standard title when Hitler was being referred to in press announcements.⁸⁶ The fact that he now became universally known as 'Führer' within the Party was evidently largely due to the homage paid to Hitler by Eckart, Rosenberg, and Göring in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on the occasion of his birthday on 20 April. It is unclear from Hitler's public statements whether he yet envisaged playing this role outside the Party. Thus, while in his speeches during the first half of 1923 there are repeated calls for 'strong leaders',⁸⁷ on the other hand, in his speech in the Circus Krone on 4 May, for example, he was still evading the issue: 'What Germany needs for its salvation is a dictatorship of nationalist willpower and nationalist determination. That poses the question: Does a suitable person exist? Our task is not to seek this person. He will either be sent by heaven or he won't be. Our task is to create the sword that this person will need when he arrives. Our task is to give the dictator a nation that is ready for him.'⁸⁸

In July his ambition was already becoming more obvious: 'As leader of the National Socialist Party I see my task as being to take over responsibility.'⁸⁹

From August onwards, he repeatedly demanded the establishment of a dictatorship, an objective that, as the crisis intensified, became widespread within the whole of the Right.⁹⁰ In an interview with the *Daily Mail* on 2 October, he drew a significant parallel with Mussolini: 'If a German Mussolini is given to Germany, he said, people would fall down on their knees and worship him more than Mussolini has ever been worshipped.'⁹¹

Gradually, however, he felt himself being pushed by his own supporters into taking on the role of dictator. On 14 October, at a Nazi meeting in Nuremberg, he strongly criticized Kahr, for 'a true statesman, a real dictator does not depend on anyone; the nation depends on him; he gives it fresh heart and then leads it along the path that he has defined as the right one'. And there were models: 'three great Germans' – Luther, Frederick the Great, and Wagner – who were great 'because they led a truly heroic life in defiance of everybody else'. Simply because 'they relied exclusively on their great insights all three became pioneers and thus national heroes'. That, Hitler made clear to his supporters at the end of his speech, was what he too was seeking to do: 'to go on fighting and not to lose sight of the goal I have set myself of being a pioneer of the great German freedom movement that will bring us unity within and without, not relying on anyone else but only on my immense resolve and with it and through it either gaining victory or going down to defeat'.⁹² His ambition to become 'Führer', 'dictator', and therefore 'hero' must have become clear to his audience. His supporters too had considerable ambitions. If one reads the *Völkischer Beobachter* during this period, it becomes clear what hopes he had inspired in the meantime. For example, on 1 November, it declared: 'Then, the black swastika flag will be unfurled over the heads of the cowards and this moribund regime, and, under Hitler's leadership, will lead us on to victory.'⁹³ These quotations show that, by the autumn of 1923, Hitler had arrived at the point where he was ready to declare himself 'Führer' and take on the role of 'hero'. In the end, if he was not to make a fool of himself, he had no choice but to meet the high expectations of his followers by carrying out the 'act' of liberation, his 'heroic deed'.

However, while psyching himself up to take on his grand role, Hitler completely overlooked the fact that, by the end of October, the chances of carrying out a successful putsch were rapidly disappearing. The Reich government had decided to depose the socialist-communist governments in Thuringia and Saxony and ordered Reichswehr troops to intervene.⁹⁴ This removed the pretext for the mobilization on the Bavarian border. Moreover,

by establishing the Rentenbank in October, the Reich government had introduced an important measure for combatting inflation and then, by creating a new currency, had taken a decisive step towards stabilizing the economy.

The paramilitary leagues in the Kampfbund began to doubt whether Kahr really wanted to launch a coup. On 1 November, there was a further meeting between Seisser, Hitler, and Weber at the latter's house. Hitler renewed a previous promise not to undertake any action against the Reichswehr and the state police, but at the same time made it clear that he was coming under considerable pressure from his own people and could not afford to wait much longer.⁹⁵ Seisser, however, having taken soundings in Berlin on 3 November, discovered that the army chief, General von Seeckt, had definitely decided not to move against the Reich government. This effectively scuppered the Triumvirate's plans for a coup.⁹⁶ At a meeting of the leagues on 6 November Kahr urgently warned them not take the 'abnormal' path towards establishing a dictatorship.⁹⁷ However, the members of the Kampfbund were afraid that they were in danger of missing the opportunity for a putsch. 'The Kampfbund people', Hitler told the prosecutors after his putsch, 'had been pressing for action; they couldn't wait any longer; they had been promised that something was going to happen for so long and had been in training for so long, that now they wanted to see some real action. Otherwise, there was a danger that suddenly some group or other (not the Nazis, as Hitler explicitly emphasized!) would act on their own (for example, grab a few dozen Jews and string them up!). That had to be prevented from happening.' Apart from that, the money had run out, people were discontented, and there was a danger that the Kampfbund would fall apart.⁹⁸

Too weak to act without the Reichswehr, state police, and the Bavarian government, let alone against them, Hitler and the Kampfbund leadership decided to seize the initiative themselves and drag the hesitant Triumvirate with them. The Triumvirate had announced a mass meeting in the Bürgerbräukeller for 8 November and this appeared to provide the opportunity to act. According to Hitler's own account, he made the decision on the evening of 6 November in a discussion with two other Nazis, whose names he later refused to reveal; they were probably Scheubner-Richter and Theodor von der Pfordten. The decisive Kampfbund meetings took place on 7 November.⁹⁹

On the evening of 8 November, Hitler surrounded the beer hall with his Kampfbund units and, adopting a martial pose, made a dramatic entry. At

the head of a small group of close associates, including Hanfstängl, Amann, and Hess, he marched into the packed hall, waving a pistol, and interrupted Kahr's speech. Describing the scene a few months later to the Munich People's Court, he commented: 'It's obvious that one can't go in waving a palm leaf'. He held his pistol to the head of an officer who approached him. In the meantime, storm troopers put a guard on the entrance and set up a heavy machine gun aimed at the audience.

Hitler now got up onto a chair and, unable to make himself heard, fired a shot into the ceiling. He made a short speech in which he announced that the 'nationalist revolution' had broken out and the Munich and Berlin governments had been deposed. He then ordered Kahr, Lossow, and Seisser to follow him into an adjacent room. There, waving his pistol around, he explained to them that they were going to establish a new government in Bavaria under former police chief Pöhner, while Kahr was to be state governor. Bavaria, continued Hitler, was to be the jumping off point for the takeover of power in the Reich; a government would then be established under his leadership, with Ludendorff in charge of the army and Seisser the police.¹⁰⁰ Finally, Hitler is supposed to have said: 'I know that you gentlemen will find it difficult, but we must take this step; we shall have to make it easier for you gentlemen to make the break. Each one of us must take up the position to which he is assigned; if he doesn't then he'll have no right to exist. You must fight with me, triumph with me, or die with me. If it all goes wrong I have four bullets in my pistol, three for my collaborators and the last one for myself.'

Hitler then returned to the hall and gave a second speech announcing the composition of the new Bavarian and Reich governments.¹⁰¹ Shortly afterwards, Ludendorff entered the Bürgerbräukeller and he and Hitler now tried to put moral pressure on the Triumvirate. Finally, the three declared their agreement with the coup, returning to the hall to proclaim their 'unity'. Then, in brief speeches, Kahr, Lossow, Seisser, and Pöhner all announced they had agreed to participate in the coup d'état.

Meanwhile, the putschists had been trying to occupy government buildings and army barracks in the city, although in most cases meeting resistance and failing to achieve their objectives.¹⁰² When Hitler left the Bürgerbräukeller late in the evening in order to find out why they had failed to occupy the pioneer corps barracks, Kahr, Lossow, and Seisser seized the opportunity to leave the beer hall and immediately began taking steps to crush the putsch.¹⁰³ In the meantime, Prime Minister von Knilling, various Bavarian ministers,

and the Munich police chief, who were present in the hall, had been taken hostage by the putschists and were kept prisoner throughout the following day.¹⁰⁴ During the night, various armed groups had also taken captive a number of mainly upper-middle-class Jews and taken them off to the Bürgerbräukeller.¹⁰⁵ The next morning, following Göring's orders, storm troopers forced their way into the town hall and took hostage the deputy mayor and seven city councillors belonging to the KPD, SPD, and USPD; all were freed the following day.¹⁰⁶ In addition, the putschists 'confiscated' a large quantity of paper money from two printers, in order to pay the troops. Legally, this was clearly theft.¹⁰⁷

As became clear during the night, the Reichswehr and the paramilitary state police remained loyal to the existing government, which meant that the putsch was doomed to fail.¹⁰⁸ During the morning, the putschists assembled in the Bürgerbräukeller decided to make a final attempt to turn the tide: they began a demonstration march aiming to go through the centre of the city towards the military district headquarters, which Röhm had occupied with his Reichskriegsflagge. Shortly before reaching the building, at the Feldherrnhalle, the roughly 2,000 putschists came up against a barricade manned by the state police. Suddenly a few shots rang out – those responsible were never identified – leading to an exchange of fire during which four policemen, thirteen putschists, and a bystander were killed; two further putschists were killed as a result of an exchange of fire at the military district headquarters. Among the dead were Scheubner-Richter, who, marching arm in arm with Hitler, had pulled the latter to the ground as he fell. Hitler escaped in the fleeing crowd with a dislocated shoulder. Göring, who was also able to escape, had a bullet wound. Streicher, Frick, Pöhner, Amann, and Röhm were all arrested at the Feldherrnhalle; Ludendorff, who had marched towards the police cordon oblivious to the shooting, was also arrested.¹⁰⁹

Hitler succeeded in making his way to Hanfstängl's house in Uffing on the Staffelsee, where he was found by the police two days later in a desperate and depressed state and taken into custody. In Hanfstängl's house Hitler composed a 'political testament', appointing Rosenberg Party chairman and making Amann his deputy.¹¹⁰