

Appeal by the Reich Government to the German People (February 1, 1933)

Abstract

Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor by Reich President Paul von Hindenburg on January 30, 1933. At the time, Germany was in the midst of the Great Depression, and unemployment stood at almost 35%. On February 1, only two days after his so called *Machtübernahme* (seizure of power), Hitler delivered this appeal to the German people on behalf of the new Reich government. The speech was broadcast on the radio and reprinted in newspapers throughout Germany the following day. Hitler's government proclamation outlines the perceived ills of German society and the Nazis' plans to remedy them. Motifs of loss, victimization, and anger are evident throughout the text. For the Nazis, the German people were the victims of an unfair peace settlement in 1918; they were persecuted by the "November parties" (those who declared the Republic and created its constitution); and they were facing a supposedly existential crisis from Germany's Communists. But in Hitler, Germany now had a confident, resolute leader, a chance to undo the crimes of the Left, and an opportunity to unite the German people across classes. This was a moment to restore "unity of mind and will" and a chance to return Germany to equal status among nations. These themes aided Hitler's rise to power and made proclamations like this one appealing, offering the sense that Germany was moving forward, away from the chaos and failures of Weimar.

Source

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 Since those days of treason, the Almighty has withdrawn his blessing from our nation.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

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

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

The insane idea that some are the conquerors and others the conquered destroys the trust between nations and thereby also destroys the world economy. But the misery of our people is terrible! The starving industrial proletariat have become unemployed in their millions, while the whole middle and artisan class have been made paupers. If the German farmer also is involved in this collapse, then we shall be faced with a catastrophe of vast proportions. For in that case, not only will an empire collapse,

but also a 2000-year-old legacy of the highest works of human culture and civilization.

All around us are symptoms portending this breakdown. With an unparalleled effort of will and brute force, the Communist method of insanity is trying as a last resort to poison and undermine an inwardly shaken and uprooted nation. This method aims for an epoch which would correspond even less to the promises made by Communist speakers today than did the epoch now drawing to a close correspond to the promises made by those same apostles in November 1918.

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

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

We are coming into possession of an appalling legacy.

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

The National Government will therefore regard as its first and supreme task to restore to the German people unity of mind and will. It will preserve and defend the foundations on which the strength of our nation rests. It will take under its firm protection Christianity as the basis of our morality, and the family as the nucleus of our nation and our state. Standing above estates and classes, it will bring back to our people the consciousness of its racial and political unity and the obligations arising therefrom. It intends to base the education of German youth on respect for our great past and pride in our old traditions. It will therefore declare merciless war on spiritual, political, and cultural nihilism. Germany must not and will not sink into Communist anarchy.

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

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

It will save the German farmer so that the nation's food supply and thus the life of the nation will be secured.

It will save the German worker by a massive and comprehensive attack on unemployment.

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

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

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

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

Within four years, unemployment must be completely overcome.

The prerequisites for the recovery of the rest of the economy present themselves in parallel to this.

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

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

The main pillars of this program include the ideas of mandatory labor service and settlement policy.

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

The frugality of its administration, the promotion of work, the preservation of agriculture, and the exploitation of individual initiative comprise the best safeguard against the threat that any experiment could pose to our currency. In foreign policy, the National Government will see its highest mission in the preservation of our people's right to an independent life and, by this means, the regaining of their freedom. The determination of this Government to put an end to chaotic conditions in Germany is a step towards integration into the community of nations as a state having equal status and therefore equal rights with the rest. Meanwhile, the Government is aware of its great obligation to support, as the Government of a free and equal nation, the maintenance and consolidation of peace, which the world needs today more than ever before.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Government that raises the nation wants to work, and it will work.

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

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

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

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

The result is a heap of ruins.

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

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

Source of English translation: Appeal by the Reich Government to the German People (February 1, 1933), in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919–1945*, vol. 1, *The Rise to Power 1919–1934*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 131–34. Reproduced with permission of the Licensor through PLSclear. Published translation edited slightly by GHI staff.

Source of original German text: Aufruf der Reichsregierung an das deutsche Volk (1. February 1933), *Völkischer Beobachter*, February 2, 1933. The speech was also reprinted in the February 2 edition of numerous other German newspapers, including *Der Freiheitskampf*, Nr. 28, Donnerstag, den 2. Februar 1933. Available online at:
<https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper/item/IKLBKVHXIX6OXNULVPUSUIL26OQ5QT3M?issuepage=1>

Recommended Citation: Appeal by the Reich Government to the German People (February 1, 1933), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:document-3940>> [May 20, 2024].