

Hitler's Speech at the Opening of the German International Automobile Exhibition (1934)

Abstract

The motorization of Germany, from the construction of highways to the mass production of vehicles, played an important role in the Nazi regime's long-term economic plan. In this speech at the 1934 German International Automobile Exhibition, Adolf Hitler lays out his vision for mass motorization in Germany. According to Hitler, by 1934, the German automobile industry had lost its place as world leader, a lamentable situation that he attributes to the "terrible overall economic collapse" of the German economy. Comparing vehicle ownership rates in Germany to those in the United States, and to the rest of Europe, Hitler emphasizes Germany's industrial capacity and the need to dramatically increase automobile production as a top economic priority. Specifically, he links increased production to improvements in living standards, both in terms of employment and access to transportation. The expansion of the automotive industry also served a clear ideological purpose. Here Hitler takes aim at the ideological struggle brought about by the invasion of "the Marxist world of ideas" into the German political realm. He blames Marxist thinking for false notions of economic equality that, in his view, failed to raise living standards and instead kept them universally and arbitrarily low to create supposed equality. In contrast, the German automobile industry, he argues, must pursue expansion. This all-encompassing goal involved building great, countrywide highways [*Autobahnen*] and producing an affordable car specifically designed for German families.

Source

Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler Opens the Exhibition with the Following Words:

Men and women!

On behalf of the Protector of the German International Automobile Exhibition, the Reich President, I am passing along his sincere congratulations on this day.

The Reich President has taken note of the development of the German automobile industry in the past twelve months with great joy.

For: the German automobile and motorcycle industry has essentially fulfilled the hopes that were and had to be pinned on it. When I had the honor a year ago to open the first automobile exhibition in the new Reich, the German economy was at a low point that had us fear the worst. Only measures of drastic effect and the greatest urgency could possibly bring relief. The army of the unemployed, the hardship of their living, categorically commanded us to forgo all illusions of economic theory and fantasy and implement those measures that alone could be appropriate to steer us out of this general destitution. A detailed examination of these conditions and the possibility of remedying them revealed the following strange fact, among other things:

While the German people used to always march at the top when it comes to traffic development, it has fallen behind in the motorization of traffic in a way that at first seems entirely unfathomable.

In the United States there are roughly 24 million automobiles per 125 million inhabitants. If we assume a similar general proportionality, this would mean a number of more than 12 million automobiles for Germany. That these conditions do not apply to Germany is well known to all of us. In comparison to its

western, large European neighboring states alone, Germany should have a stock of about 3 million automobiles today. Meanwhile there are only little more than 500,000 being driven in Germany today.

To claim that this corresponds with the overall standard of living, the economic or technical capability of our people is absurd. The demand for transportation in Germany, a country of such immense industrialization with more than 50 major cities certainly is not lower but at least as high as in the abovementioned states. The reasons for this strange phenomenon are different ones:

1. The German automobile industry has lost all closer contact with the same industries of other nations for the duration of almost half a decade because of the war. This is very detrimental for a production that is still being built up and only stays in the flow of development by constant measuring up against the competition that threatens it.
2. The terrible overall economic collapse of the postwar period has made its disastrous effects felt in this industry as well.
3. The political ideology of the Marxist world of ideas, which has increasingly become accepted since the collapse, has unfortunately fought a more than successful battle for the most primitive level of needs possible. Since the theory of equality at no time had the opportunity to elevate the poorest to the level of the millionaires, it at least tried—true to principle and dogma—to lower everyone's standard of living. Such an ideal of primitivism is not just a setback in cultural terms, but in its economic effects also has disastrous consequences for a people that, like the German people, has been destined for a higher purpose by birth and has organized and equipped itself for it by a thousand-year-old economic process. Thus it became possible that in our nation ownership of an automobile was still considered a luxury at a time when in America there already was an automobile for one in every five inhabitants, including women and children.

This mentality had even more negative effects since two phenomena emerged from it:

The German automobile industry was itself infected by the belief in the luxurious character of this new mode of transportation and expressed this more or less ill-advisedly in its production program both through design and pricing. Meanwhile German governments for their part sought to urgently enforce the Marxist principles vis-à-vis this new luxury article by taxation as well as by their officially directed transport policy.

These joint efforts had to succeed in strangling the spread and development of this new mode of transportation—slowly but surely.

And they succeeded!

[...]

It is not just out of this purely economic consideration that the National Socialist state wants to promote the motorization of our transport with all means. As long as the automobile remains a means of transportation for particularly well-to-do circles only, it will be difficult to remove its previously attached class-emphasizing and thus sadly also class-separating character. Yet it is a bitter feeling to know millions of one's good, hard-working and able fellow citizens to be a priori excluded from the use of a means of transportation that could not only be useful to these classes who are more limited in their other opportunities in life, but especially on Sundays and holidays could also become a source of a blissful joy for them that is already familiar to us.

The claim that this is a priori impossible in Germany is ridiculous. How long ago was it that the most primitive small German car cost 4600 Mark; 4600 Mark for which one gets a wonderful 6-cylinder

limousine by one of the leading car companies today.

No, one must have the courage to tackle this problem unflinchingly and broadly and to bring about a solution. What cannot be achieved within a year will perhaps have been achieved in four or five years, and in only ten years it will be taken for granted.

Therefore it is the will of the National Socialist political leadership to promote the automobile industry not only in order to stimulate the economy and give hundreds of thousands of people a way to make a living, but also to give an ever growing mass of our people the opportunity to acquire this most modern means of transportation.

[...]

Yet these tasks are great:

For, gentlemen: If we really mean to increase the number of automobile owners in Germany into the millions, this can only be achieved if we adjust its price to the buying power of the millions-strong mass of buyers to be considered for this. If the German government wishes the German people to take an active interest in the automobile, the economy has to create and build a suitable automobile for the German people. Only a few months ago German industry managed to produce a new People's Receiver [*Volksempfänger*], thus putting on the market and selling an enormous number of radios.

I would like to suggest that the most important task for the German automobile industry is to increasingly move towards designing the car that will inevitably give it access to millions of new buyers. For only if we succeed in winning over the broadest mass for this new means of transportation will its usefulness not only for our national economy but also for our society be indisputable.

[...]

Source: Reichsverband der Automobilindustrie, e.V., ed., *Vollgas voraus! Drei Reden gehalten aus Anlass der Internationalen Automobil- und Motorradausstellung 1934*. Berlin, 1934, pp. 7–12.

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