

Arnold Brecht on Heinrich Brüning and the National Socialists (Retrospective Account, 1967)

Abstract

Heinrich Brüning, of whom Arnold Brecht had a positive opinion, only reluctantly and half-heartedly took action against the National Socialists. In view of the NSDAP's successes in national and state elections, Brüning repeatedly attempted to determine whether it was feasible for the Center Party to enter into a coalition or cooperate with the NSDAP, initially at the regional level. The first confidential talks between Hitler and Brüning were held on October 5, 1930, but produced no tangible results. Additional negotiations between the two parties, including the coalition talks after the Hessian state elections on November 15, 1931, failed because of the Nazis' claim to government leadership. Most of the initiatives to combat the Nazi movement, including the ban on the SA and SS on April 13, 1932, originated in the states (not only in Prussia, but also in Bavaria under Minister President Heinrich Held, a member of the Bavarian People's Party). Fewer initiatives were launched by Brüning's government. This brief excerpt from the memoirs of Arnold Brecht (1884-1977), a high-ranking civil servant and staunch republican, describes the developments that prompted Brüning to issue emergency decrees designed to curb the growing political violence that destabilized the Republic.

Source

Effective foreign, economic, and financial policy appeared more important to Brüning in the fight against National Socialists than legal or police measures. In this basic conception he was certainly correct.

But the ever-growing threat of violence and terror forced Brüning, from the spring of 1931 onward, also to resort to measures of frontal attack against the extremists. A series of emergency decrees, issued from March, 1931 to April, 1932, served this end. They ordered all public meetings held outdoors and all parades to be announced to the police forty-eight hours in advance, and permitted their prohibition if facts substantiated the fear that public peace and safety would be endangered. They ordered all posters, tracts, and leaflets to be submitted to the police first, who could forbid their dissemination for the same reason. They banned the use of trucks in political parades since trucks had often been used as armored cars. They authorized the police to prohibit private uniforms and badges of political organizations, since the Reichsgericht had questioned the legality of a Prussian ordinance issued without federal authorization. Later (in November 1931), a federal decree imposed such a ban directly for the whole of Germany, therewith making the wearing of the National Socialist brown shirts in public illegal everywhere. The police were entitled also to close down any gathering place from which violent actions had started.

Penalties for high treason against the Republic were increased, as well as those for withholding the names of editors or printers of publications endangering peace and safety. The wearing of arms at places where that was forbidden, especially at public meetings or parades, could lead to arrest. The arrested person was entitled to ask for a trial only on the question of whether he had violated this prohibition; if he had done so he could not dispute his detention up to three months.

Hindenburg signed all these emergency decrees as submitted to him by the Brüning Cabinet. The ever-growing number of violent acts became threatening indeed. Most of them occurred in fights between National Socialists and Communists, yet clashes with the defenders of the Weimar Constitution, too, caused shedding of blood. Every month a growing number of persons were killed in such clashes or

secretly slain.

Source: Arnold Brecht, *The Political Education of Arnold Brecht, An Autobiography 1884–1970*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970, pp. 324–25.

Source of original German text: Arnold Brecht, *Mit der Kraft des Geistes: Lebenserinnerungen 1927–1967*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1967, pp. 137–39.

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