

Heinrich Brüning Delivering an Election Campaign Speech (1930)

Abstract

When the coalition government under Chancellor Hermann Müller (SPD) collapsed over the question of how to fund unemployment insurance during a period of growing joblessness, President Paul von Hindenburg appointed the center-right politician Heinrich Brüning (Zentrum) as his successor on March 28, 1930. Brüning could not secure a parliamentary majority for his economic agenda, either. When he tried to pass austerity measures via an emergency decree from the president, moreover, a parliamentary majority overruled him. In frustration, Brüning asked Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag in July 1930 and call new elections, despite the misgivings of his political allies, who worried that the country's economic downturn would hurt them at the polls.

This film clip shows part of a short campaign speech by Brüning, delivered directly to the camera. It was filmed in the run-up to the elections on September 14, 1930, and was probably shown in movie theaters before the main feature, similar to the weekly newsreels. In his speech, Brüning criticized the country's various political parties for representing the interests just of their own narrow bases of voters rather than those of the nation as a whole. Brüning also called on everyone to accept certain sacrifices, an allusion to his agenda for balancing the budget by cutting social benefits, despite the growing numbers of Germans out of work. His campaign hoped, in particular, to mobilize the roughly 20% of eligible voters who did not show up at the polls. Although voter participation in the September 1930 Reichstag elections did increase by over 6%—to an impressive 82% of eligible voters—none of that increase benefited Brüning's Zentrum Party or any of its coalition allies. Instead, the extreme-right NSDAP registered the most gains, with the far-left KPD also gaining a significant number of new seats. Brüning nevertheless remained in office, despite lacking a majority that actively supported him and his agenda. Instead, he governed through the use of emergency decrees that Hindenburg issued on his behalf, under an arrangement known as a “presidential cabinet” [*Präsidentalkabinett*] that depended on the “toleration” of the moderate-left SPD, which still remained—for the time being—the largest party in the Reichstag. This meant that the SPD would not necessarily vote for Brüning's measures, but it would not vote to overrule them either, a move that the SPD feared would trigger new elections and even greater gains for the Nazis.

Source

Source: Tonfilmrede des Herrn Reichskanzlers, Tobis-Film GmbH, 1930. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv
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