

Rudolf Hess Warns against Alienating the Middle Classes (1932)

Abstract

Hitler's failure to form a Nazi government following the Reichstag elections of July 1932 had dealt the movement a significant blow. Seeking to capitalize on the lowered morale of the Nazi Party, Papen once again called for new elections. A loss of Nazi seats in parliament might convince the Nazis to work with rather than against the government. Appalled by the reactionary nature of the Papen regime, Joseph Goebbels launched a propaganda campaign that sought to smear the Papen government as a "small feudal clique" with no other aim than to isolate the National Socialists. In the following memorandum, Rudolf Hess points out the possible danger of alienating the middle classes without actually increasing the appeal of the Nazi Party to the working classes.

Source

It is inexpedient to gear the campaign to the slogan: "Against the rule of the barons," as has already happened in some cases in the Party's propaganda and press. This slogan is welcome ammunition to the Government, the German Nationalists, and other opponents who can, with some appearance of justification, maintain that the NSDAP, having already "given up the fight against the Center," having "stood by parliamentary methods," is now "showing class war tendencies." [...]

The electoral damage produced by this would be greater than any advantage gained. A large number of voters on the Right will undoubtedly be impressed by the partly justified claim that the NSDAP is going over to class-war slogans. We cannot expect to make up for this by extra votes from the Left. For the majority of those who are impressed by this slogan will gravitate towards or stay with the party which expresses it in the most radical way. And that means now, as before, the Marxist parties, for class war is one of the basic points in their program. [...]

The [Nazi] movement has now won over just about all the voters it can by the methods of propaganda pursued hitherto, that is to say, by means of its general ideological line and propaganda based on general aims. In addition, in this election campaign we are confronted by a government that has succeeded in creating the impression among part of the electorate, and no doubt among some of our former supporters, that it is they who are now putting into practice, or in some cases have already carried out, the things which the National Socialists aimed for but were not themselves in a position to carry out. They claim that the National Socialists have no clear and practical goals and that in so far as their aims are known, they represent dangerous experiments; the Nazis can certainly damn the measures taken by the Government but they do not explain how they propose to do better. [...]

Criticism of the Government therefore, must above all not be phrased in too general terms such as "Government of the Barons," "reactionary legacy hunters," but must always be supported with concrete examples. [...]

Source of English translation: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Nazism 1919-1945*, Vol. 1, *The Rise to Power 1919-1934*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1998, pp. 106-07.

Source of original German text: National Archives, Washington, DC. American Committee for the Study of War Documents. National Archives Microcopy No, T-81, Roll No. R-1 Frames 11427-11432.

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