

# The Kapp-Lüttwitz Putsch in Berlin (1920)

## Abstract

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This footage captured scenes from the violent attempt by right-wing, anti-republican forces in March 1920 to overthrow Germany's democratically elected government. Far-right circles in Germany had resented the republic since its founding, and this hostility had only grown in intensity as the government started complying with the Versailles Treaty's provisions, especially those related to the country's disarmament. When, in early 1920, republican leaders began disbanding the far-right paramilitary units known as "Freikorps," in compliance with the treaty, those units decided to launch a counterstrike. Led by General Walther von Lüttwitz, one of the highest-ranking officers in Germany, and his co-conspirator Wolfgang Kapp, a founder of the ultra-nationalist Fatherland Party in 1917, Freikorps irregulars marched into the center of Berlin on March 13 and occupied key government buildings, quickly proclaiming Kapp the new chancellor and Lüttwitz as defense minister. Although some army officers refused to obey orders from Kapp and Lüttwitz, the army itself also did nothing to halt this violent and unlawful seizure of power.

Instead, the elected government—which had fled the city by this point—began to mobilize the overwhelming backing of the country's trade unions, all of which agreed to a general strike that quickly ground factories, transportation, power, administration, shops, and communication in Berlin and across the country to a complete standstill. Utterly lacking in any popular support, the putsch's main organizers fled abroad on March 17, and the Freikorps insurgents themselves left Berlin the following day, under a torrent of insults that prompted some of those embittered irregulars to open fire and kill a dozen people—a cruel exclamation point to the conclusion of a disgraceful episode.

In the first scenes included here, filmed by an unknown camera operator, columns of soldiers march down Unter den Linden—Berlin's grand boulevard—to the Reich Chancellery. Later footage shows armored cars, machine guns, and roadblocks in the city, most of them operated by the men in Hermann Ehrhardt's Freikorps brigade, the driving force behind the coup attempt.

## Source

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Source: *Der Kapp-Putsch in Berlin* (archive title), 1920. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 25602, <https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/25602/635023>

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