

Wilhelm Groener on Banning the SA (1932)

Abstract

The 1932 presidential election made for strange political bedfellows – for instance, it saw the parties of the moderate left (SPD, Catholic Center) show their support for conservative incumbent Paul von Hindenburg, whom they viewed as the lesser of two evils vis-à-vis the Nazi candidate Adolf Hitler. After Hindenburg's reelection, many state governments called for action to be taken to diminish the threat of the Nazi party, particularly its paramilitary organization, the SA [*Sturmabteilung* or Storm Detachment], which was responsible for inciting political unrest and perpetrating acts of physical violence on the streets of Germany. On his own accord, Prussian Minister of the Interior Carl Severing (SPD) ordered the police to raid various Nazi headquarters throughout the state. After Severing's raids unearthed evidence of an SA coup that was being planned in the event of a Hitler victory, Reich Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Groener decided that a national ban on the SA would be a prudent step in the taming of this radical party. Groener was certainly no friend of the Nazis, but he did believe that they could be made more palatable and that the conservative right could work with them.

Source

On Monday or Tuesday, the Ministers of the Interior of the states are coming to a meeting about the SA. I have no doubt that we will master it – one way or the other. I think we have already drawn its poisonous fangs. One can made good tactical use of the endless declarations of legality made by the SA leaders, which they have handed to me in thick volumes. The SA is thereby undermining its credibility. But there are still difficult weeks of political maneuvering until the various *Landtag* elections are over. Then, one will have to start working towards making the Nazis acceptable as participants in a government because the movement, which will certainly grow, can no longer be suppressed by force. Of course the Nazis must not be allowed to form a government of their own anywhere, let alone in the Reich. But in the states an attempt will have to be made here and there to harness them in a coalition and to cure them of their utopias by constructive government work. I can see no better way, for the idea of trying to destroy the Party through an anti-Nazi law on the lines of the old anti-Socialist law I would regard as a very unfortunate undertaking. With the SA of course it is different. They must be eliminated in any event, and ideally the so-called Iron Front as well. [...]

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. 98-99.

Source of original German text: R.G. Phelps, "Aus den Groener Dokumenten," *Deutsche Rundschau* 76 (1950), p. 1019ff. Excerpt from letter to Alarich von Gleich, April 2, 1932.

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