

Hitler's Beer Hall Politics: A Reassessment based on New Historical Scholarship

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Abstract

As the eightieth anniversary of Adolf Hitler's accession to power in Germany approaches in 2013, recent scholarship has revised Hitler's description of his formative experiences. This new scholarship demonstrates that Hitler's time in Munich was far more significant than his period in Vienna. The new secondary literature demonstrates conclusively that Munich, not Vienna, became the "school of his life." It was in Munich, as a "beer hall agitator," where Hitler learned the political skills he would later employ to outmaneuver Germany's professional politicians and seize power in 1933. Ian Kershaw has described Hitler's years in Munich as "the years of his political apprenticeship." Hitler developed an "aggressive obstinacy" during his years in Munich that led to his political success. The "aggressive obstinacy" developed after numerous experiences in Munich's beer halls. This paper argues that the road to the Reich's Chancellery in 1933 led through Munich's beer halls in the 1920s.

Key Words: Adolf Hitler, Germany, Third Reich, National Socialism, Munich, Beer Hall.

Introduction

In *Mein Kampf*, Adolf Hitler wrote that his political development occurred during his time in Vienna before he came to Germany in 1913. In Vienna, Hitler wrote, "I obtained the foundations for a philosophy in general and a political view in particular which later I only needed to supplement in detail, but which never left me." In fact, Hitler argues that his political "awakening" caused him to leave Vienna for Munich. "Vienna was and remained for me the hardest, though most thorough, school of my life" (Hitler 1971: 125). Recently, scholars have investigated and revised Hitler's description of his formative experiences. The work of John Lukacs, Ian Kershaw, Richard Evans and others, has shown that Hitler's time in Munich was far more important for his political career than his period in Vienna. In other words Munich, not Vienna, became the "school of his life."

On the eve of the eightieth anniversary of Hitler's assumption of power in January 1933, a reappraisal of Hitler's early career is appropriate. The newest scholarship demonstrates that Hitler's political ideology, the ideology he would cling to for the rest of his life, solidified in Munich. Most of the authors agree that in the beer halls, a vital institution in Munich cultural and political life, Hitler perfected the oratorical skills he used to mesmerize the German nation until 1945. However, these scholars touch only lightly on another lesson Hitler learned in the beer hall. Hitler's beer hall career taught him the political devices and skills that he would later employ to outmaneuver Germany's professional politicians and seize power in 1933. This paper argues that the road to Germany's Reich's Chancellery leads through the Munich beer hall.

1. The Education of a Corporal.

According to Lukacs, Hitler's political development "crystallized" sometime around his thirty-first birthday, in April 1919. He argues that Hitler's political philosophy developed after the failed Munich Soviet Republic of that year. Germany's surrender in 1918 and Hitler's "witnessing of the ridiculous and sordid episode of the Munich Soviet republic, with its Jewish and lumpen intellectuals" crystallized Hitler's rabid anti-Semitism. Lukacs notes that there is "no evidence of anti-Semitic utterances (private or public) by Hitler before his thirty-first year." (Lukacs 1997: 57-59). Ian Kershaw writes that "if Hitler's anti-Semitism was indeed formed in Vienna, why did it remain unnoticed by those around him?" (Kershaw 1998: 66). Kershaw has demonstrated that Hitler's years in Munich constitute "the years of his political apprenticeship." (Kershaw 1998: 131). In this context, Hitler's beer hall activities take on a new significance. Munich and its famous beer halls proved decisive to Hitler's political ascent. Scholars have argued that Hitler's career could not have developed in any other city.

Munich offered an element essential to the birth of a mass movement that Berlin and Vienna could not: the large, rumbling beer hall that could hold thousands of people. In the beer hall, Hitler was able to address “defeated and disillusioned Bavarians.” The Berlin journalist, Stephan Grossmann, “bemoaned the lack of such auditoriums in Berlin where agitators were obliged to use street corners as forums.” Ernest Pope, American Consul in Munich at the time wrote that “Hitler never would have become *Führer* of the Third Reich without the help of Munich’s mass production, mass consumption guzzling establishments.” (Fishman 1964: 255).

Hitler learned about the significance of the beer hall to Munich culture in the period before World War One. Even then, Hitler was never at home in the beer hall: he was out place and the patrons knew it. Since his days in Vienna, Hitler did not drink beer or alcohol, did not eat red meat, and he did not smoke. This marked him as an odd ball and a stranger in the beer hall in the days before World War One. Hitler sold his paintings in the beer halls, including the *Löwengarten*, the shady little beer garden in the courtyard of the *Hofbräuhaus* beer hall. On one occasion, a customer bought one of his paintings and noticed that Hitler “went over to the buffet and bought two pair of Vienna sausage and bread, but had no beer.” (Joachimsthaler 1989: 83-86).

Hitler preferred cafes. In his early years in the city, Hitler lived in Schwabing, the bohemian, artist district with its many cafes, located just north of the old city by the university. Later on, as supreme dictator of Germany, he preferred to visit a little Italian café on the *Schellingstrasse*. According to Hitler’s favorite architect and later Minister of Armaments, Albert Speer, Hitler would always look over the menu for several minutes, but inevitably ended up ordering mineral water and the ravioli. (Bauer and Piper 1986: 237-239). For Hitler, visits to the beer halls were reserved only for political events, not recreation.

Back in Munich in 1918 after four years at the front, Hitler quickly learned the political significance of the beer hall from Bavaria’s socialist revolutionaries. Munich’s revolutionary authorities used the large beer halls to organize the revolution of November 1918, and to instruct returning soldiers on the aims of the revolution. According to one observer, the revolutionary leadership “hustled all returning soldiers and sailors to the nearest beer hall to be proselytized” and win them over to the revolutionary cause if possible, or at least to neutralize them. Hitler attended many of these meetings. Here then, is where Hitler first realized the significance of the beer hall for his political activities. (Fishman 1964: 247-254).

One of the lessons that Hitler took away from the Bavarian Revolution of 1918-1919 was that the revolutionary leadership was mostly foreign and Jewish. Kurt Eisner, who proclaimed the Bavarian Revolution from the Oktoberfest grounds in November 1918, was Jewish and a Berliner, not a “real” Bavarian. In a scene that would repeat throughout Germany in the 1920s, a right wing nationalist, Count Arco Valley, assassinated Eisner on February 21, 1919 on his way to parliament to submit his resignation. On March 7, the Majority Socialist leader Adolf Hoffmann formed a coalition government but this government collapsed under a Communist assault in little more than a month (Mitchell 1965: 275-304).

The leaders of the “Bavarian Soviet Republic” that followed, Eugene Levine, Victor Axelrod, and Max Levien, were Jewish and Russian, sent to Munich by the Communist Party of Berlin. Even Bela Kuhn, the leader of the Hungarian Soviet Republic established around the same time, was Jewish (Waite 1952: 84). The deep-seeded racial hatred of Jews Hitler held for the rest of his life developed in Munich during this revolutionary period (Flood 1989: 50-51). In fact, there is some recently uncovered evidence that Hitler may have sympathized with the revolutionary government’s aims at this time. The Soviet coup of 1919, and the “White Terror” that followed changed Hitler, and many Bavarians, into a dedicated right-wingers (Kershaw 1998: 122).

For Hitler, the Bavarian Revolution demonstrated that Judaism bred Marxism. Eliminate Judaism, Hitler argued, and Marxism would disappear. Richard Evans points out that “Hitler’s anti-Bolshevism was the product of his anti-Semitism and not the other way round.” The “cruelties of the civil war and the ‘red terror’ in Lenin’s Russia were making an impact” on the local Munich population. Hitler compared the events in Russia and Hungary at the time to Munich and implored his listeners to discover the “Jewish inspiration behind the revolutionary upheavals of 1918 – 1919 in Munich” (Evans 2004: 174). This is the message Hitler took to the beer halls. Kershaw notes that “Hitler did not come to politics- politics came to him: in the barracks.” (Kershaw 1998: 122-131). After the revolution, Military authorities working for the new regime recruited Hitler to be a “*Vertrauensmann*” a “trusted political officer.” Hitler’s duties as a “Trusted Officer” included distributing “educational material” to the troops returning from the front and explaining to them the new revolutionary circumstances in Germany.

Hitler attended the University of Munich for political training, taking courses such as “German History since the Reformation,” “The Political History of the War,” “Socialism in Theory and Practice,” “Our Economic Situation and the Peace Conditions,” and “the Connection between Domestic and Foreign Policy.” Taught by specially chosen, nationalist leaning professors such as the historian Karl Alexander von Müller, Hitler’s political views solidified in this period. These professors clarified, from a conservative and nationalist perspective, the significance of the lost war and the meaning of the revolution for Hitler. (Kershaw 1998: 122-123). Revolutionary Munich truly represents the “school of his life.”

If Munich represents the school of his life, the beer hall served as the classroom. In September 1919, Hitler’s first assignment as a “Trusted Officer” took him to a meeting of the “German Workers’ Party” in the tiny *Sterneckerbräu* beer hall in Munich’s Old City. He thought that the party was “dull” and “insignificant” and was almost about to leave, when someone in the meeting suggested that Bavaria separate from the Reich and form a south German state with Austria. Hitler then went on the attack:

At this point I could not help demanding the floor and giving the learned gentleman my opinion on this point - with the result that the previous speaker, even before I was finished, left the hall like a wet poodle. . . . As I spoke, the audience had listened with astonished faces, and only as I was beginning to say goodnight to the assemblage and go away did a man come leaping after me, introduce himself. . . and press a little booklet into my hand, apparently a political pamphlet, with the request that I read it (Hitler 1971: 219).

Shortly after this Hitler joined the Party as member number 555 (Kershaw 1998: 120-127).

2. The Emergence of a Revolutionary Politician.

Hitler quickly took over planning the Party’s public events in an attempt to increase the membership. Seventy people attended the first “mass meeting” of the Party at the *Hofbräuhaus* on 16 October 1919. This represented a substantial increase in attendance from previous meetings. According to reports, there were a few fights and the meeting enhanced Hitler’s reputation as a powerful speaker (Deming and Iliff 1980: 11). A month later, in November, another mass meeting was held at the *Hofbräuhaus*, and this time the German Workers’ Party attracted their largest crowd ever: 111 people (Large 1997: 133). Hitler then quit the army and began full-time work for the Party. He had found his true love: politics.

At this point, Hitler suggested to the leadership that they charge an admission fee for the meetings to pay for advertising, rent for larger beer halls, and office space. The leader and founder of the Party, Karl Harrer, thought this crazy and resented Hitler’s meddling, but the executive committee thought it worth a try. On 13 November 1919, 129 people packed into the *Eberlbräukeller*, paying 50 cents each to hear Hitler speak. Disgusted that Hitler had been proved right, Harrer quit the party he had founded less than a year before (Flood 1989: 75-80). Shortly thereafter, on 24 February 1920 the Party held one of its most important meetings in the Festival Hall of the *Hofbräuhaus* with some 2,000 people in attendance. At this meeting Hitler announced a “Twenty-Five Point Program” of his new *National Socialist German Workers’ Party* (Joachimsthaler 1989: 268-269).

Attendees at Nazi meetings were guaranteed a good show: food and beer, a mesmerizing speech by a noted personality and, usually a brutal political brawl accompanied by flying beer mugs. During the peak of the inflation in summer and fall 1923 attendance dropped off at most political meetings. *Münchener*s could not afford the entrance fees or the prices of the beer, not to mention the prices of food. Nevertheless, the Nazi meetings, with Hitler featured as the key speaker, continued to pack the beer halls even at the height of the inflation (Kershaw 1998: 202).

The beer hall episodes also served another purpose: publicity for the movement. Publicity, especially bad publicity, brought more people to the meetings and more members. “It makes no difference whatever whether they laugh at us or revile us” Hitler remarked, “whether they represent us as clowns or criminals; the main thing is that they mention us, that they concern themselves with us again and again. . .” (Kershaw 1998: 147). The beer halls became the perfect venue for attracting the masses and gaining publicity. They were crucial to Hitler’s plan of creating a “mass movement.” Hitler came to realize that if he could just get people into the beer hall to hear him speak, he could recruit many of them for the movement. He attracted them to the beer halls with violence. Bavaria, indeed all of Germany, became a political battle ground after 1918. A result of the war, politics became radicalized on the right and left, marked by the creation of paramilitary groups such as the *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets) and *Freikorps* (Free Units, independent military brigades) in November 1918.

These groups included ex-soldiers, unemployed, and revolutionaries of all political persuasions. On both right and left, political arguments were solved not with discussion and debate, but with bullets. As Evans has cleverly phrased it, “Politics . . . became war pursued by other means” (Evans 2004: 70-72). Since violence became a necessary part of the event, the Party created the “Gymnastic and Sport Section” to train the toughs needed to protect Hitler during his speeches and restore order in the beer hall after the fighting. In August 1921 Ernst Röhm brokered a deal that merged the Erhardt *Freikorps* Brigade with the “Gymnastics and Sport Section” of the NSDAP forming a paramilitary detachment independent of, yet closely tied to the Nazi Party. In October 1921, the organization renamed itself the “*Sturmabteilung*,” the Storm Troops or the SA (Kershaw 1998: 174). With his new private army, Hitler then set out to conquer all the beer halls of Munich.

On 4 November 1921 the Storm Troopers defended their leader when he came under attacks by enemies in the crowd at the *Hofbräuhaus*. Hitler paused his speech as his Storm Troopers threw themselves “like wolves in packs of eight or ten again and again on their enemies, and little by little thrashed them out of the hall.” This became known as the “*Battle of the Hofbräuhaus*.” Hitler informed his SA men that “We have won a major battle. You have survived a baptism by fire, despite being outnumbered.” Hitler was very pleased that the local population called the Storm Troopers a “raw and brutal bunch who were afraid of nothing” (Large 1997: 148). This was a formative experience for Hitler and the Nazi Party. The party faithful gathered in Munich every year up until 1944 to commemorate the “*Battle of the Hofbräuhaus*.”

However, despite Hitler’s successes, the NSDAP remained a regional, Bavarian, party. Therefore, the Party executive committee proposed a merger with two other right-wing groups: the German Socialist Party and the *Deutsche Werkgemeinschaft*. Had such a merger gone through, Hitler would have ended up a small fish in a very large pond, something he could not tolerate. Hitler threw a fit and resigned all his offices and refused to speak ever again at party events. Realizing they had lost their big draw, party leaders pleaded with Hitler to return. For his return, Hitler demanded the chairmanship of the party with “dictatorial powers.” On 29 July 1921, at a special assembly in the *Hofbräuhaus*, 554 members of the Munich branch invested Hitler with full dictatorial powers as leader of the NSDAP. It can be argued, therefore, that Hitler’s first true “seizure of power” actually occurred in the *Hofbräuhaus* on that hot July evening in 1921. This represents “the first step on transforming the NSDAP into a new-style party, a ‘*Führer* party’ ” (Kershaw 1998: 164-165).

Having conquered the Nazi party, Hitler now used his Storm Troopers to break up the meetings of rival political parties in his attempt to make the NSDAP the only nationalist, right-wing organization in Bavaria. For example, In September 1921 Hitler and his men stormed into the *Löwenbräukeller* to disrupt a meeting of the “*Bayernbund*” a conservative federation that advocated, among other things, a return of the monarchy. Shouting “Hitler” over and over again to disrupt the speaker, fights eventually erupted, the police had to be called, and the meeting cancelled. The leader of the *Bayernbund* pressed charges and Hitler went to jail for this: less than two months in *Stadelheim* prison for disturbing the peace (Kershaw 1998: 175-176).

Historians have noted that Germans on the right had been waiting for an all powerful “*Führer*” for a long time, but at this early stage few of them saw Hitler in that role (Kershaw 1987: 13). Many saw the former World War One General Eric Ludendorff as the future dictator for Germany. Ludendorff encouraged this. In 1920, Ludendorff declared that “It would have been better if, while the war was still in progress, I had snatched the Dictatorship for myself.” Before 1923 at least, most right-wing revolutionaries referred to Ludendorff as the “national Commander,” not Hitler (Flood 1989: 108). Hitler served as the Party’s “drummer,” donating his oratorical skills and his time to the “national movement” that would eventually be lead by someone else. Indecision and self doubt afflicted the *Führer* for most of his life. But at crucial times he could steel himself to project absolute confidence, even ruthlessness. Observers noted that, at critical decision points, Hitler became anxious and filled with feelings of “inadequacy and self-doubt.” In many cases he stood “aloof, unsure what to do” (Waite 1977: 206-209).

Nevertheless, Hitler always realized his importance to the movement as an orator, and as the main attraction at the Party’s public meetings. Many others recognized Hitler’s importance as well. With the appointment of Benito Mussolini as “The Leader” (*IL Duce*) in Italy in October 1922, there began to arise a cult of personality in the Nazi Party. At a rally of the faithful in November 1922 in the *Hofbräuhaus Festsaal*, Hermann Esser declared that “Germany’s Mussolini is called Adolf Hitler!” (Kershaw 1998: 180). In the beer hall at least, there was no question as to who was “The Leader.”

During the famous “Beer Hall Putsch” of November 1923, the revolutionaries used all of Munich’s major beer halls as staging grounds. Whereas most of the *putsch* saga unfolded at the *Bürgerbräukeller*, the *Löwenbräukeller* on the west side of town also played a role in the events of 8-9 November 1923. Drunken storm troopers filled the beer hall on the *Stieglmaierplatz* awaiting their *Führer’s* order to “march.” Ernst Röhm, leader of the SA, interrupted the drinking to give patriotic speeches whenever the brass band took a break. By 11:00pm that evening, Storm Troopers and other right-wingers had packed into all Munich’s beer halls, waiting for something to happen. The police knew that something was afoot. They knew about the large numbers of SA men at the *Löwenbräukeller*. They knew too of a “*Völkische Rechtsblock*” (Right-Wing Racist Block) meeting at the *Hofbräuhaus*. And the police knew of the meeting held by Gustav von Kahr and the Bavarian government at the *Bürgerbräukeller*. What the police did not realize is that most of these men were armed, and had hidden weapons and ammunition at or near these beer halls, waiting for the command to action (Gordon 1972: 314-335).

Hitler marched into the *Bürgerbräukeller* with his SA, but the army had not joined his revolution. Von Kahr and his ministers, unsure of the situation outside the beer hall, decided to “play along with the comedy” until they could find an opportunity to escape. Later, when Hitler left the beer hall to attend to some other business across town, the triumvirate pleaded with Ludendorff for their release. Ludendorff let them go “on their word of honor” that they would continue to support the *putsch*. Once free, von Kahr and company quickly called for army reinforcements to retake control of the city and suppress the *putsch* (Dornberg 1982: 68-90). The next day, the “Hitler *putsch*” ended in gunfire on the *Odeonsplatz*, just north of city hall. Hitler’s political career, and the National Socialist Party looked finished.

The indictment against Hitler in the trial which followed laid blame for the failed *putsch* exclusively on Hitler, claiming that “Hitler was the sole of the entire enterprise.” Prosecutors deliberately designed the indictment to take pressure off the Bavarian authorities and Ludendorff who had conspired with Hitler in the *putsch*. When first arrested, Hitler was furious: not only had his fellow *putschists* betrayed him, now they were leaving him in the lurch to take all the blame for the crime himself. More ominously, Hitler now faced the prospect of real jail time and deportation if convicted, ending his political career once and maybe for all. By the time of the trial in 1924, however, Hitler’s attitude had changed. During the trial, Hitler took full responsibility for the *putsch* “not merely justifying but glorying in his role in attempting to overthrow the Weimar state” (Kershaw 1998: 214-216). To be sure, Hitler knew that he had a sympathetic audience in court. Turning the political disaster into a personal triumph, Hitler now claimed sole responsibility for the *putsch* and declared that he was from then on the only leader of the movement. Hitler had finally come to realize that if he wanted to accomplish anything, he had to lead the movement himself. Ironically, it took the failed *putsch* to “transform the unclear conception of his role in the latter months of 1923 into that of the heroic leader-figure” he created for himself in *Mein Kampf* (Kershaw 1987: 24).

While sequestered in Landsberg Fortress Prison, the entire right-wing enterprise he had helped to build almost totally collapsed. Some of this was because of the improved economic situation after the worst of the inflation subsided. Still, Hitler realized that the movement had fallen apart because he was not there: without Hitler, without the charismatic *Führer* to inspire and motivate the masses, the movement was dead. Kershaw has demonstrated that, during Hitler’s absence, “*völkisch* politics had collapsed, but his own claims to leadership had, in the process, been strengthened.” During his prison term, party activists would visit Hitler and implore him to take up leadership of the movement again. For his part, Hitler once called Landsberg prison his “university paid for by the state.” (Kershaw 1998: 229-240). The failed *putsch*, perhaps Hitler’s most important beer hall experience, had transformed him from a “frenetic revolutionary . . . into a political leader ready to accept years of careful building and constant struggle as a prelude to power.” Gordon first to recognized that, for Hitler, the *putsch* did not represent a failure at all. (Gordon 1972: 618). As a result, Hitler finally realized his singular role as “*Der Führer*.” Now, all other rivals for the position would have to be eliminated.

3. The “Bourgeois Politician” makes his Revolution.

In 1925, out of prison, Hitler reconstituted the Nazi Party in a mass meeting at the *Bürgerbräukeller*, the beer hall from where the *putsch* had been launched two years earlier. Hitler conspicuously refused to invite Ludendorff, Röhm, and Gregor Strasser, his only other ideological rivals in the party leadership. At the end of the meeting, the functionaries present approached Hitler to shake his hand and profess their absolute loyalty and offer obeisance. To those in the hall, there could be no mistaking the symbolism. Kershaw describes the scene similar to “medieval vassals swearing fealty to their overlord” (Kershaw 1998: 266-267).

Also, from this time forward the “Heil Hitler” salute, a voluntary gesture before 1923, now became mandatory for all members. This was another “outward sign of the binding of the Party faithful to the figure of their leader.” (Kershaw 1987: 26).

The leader of the SA, Röhm, now out of favor with Hitler and the Bavarian government, fled to Bolivia. Then, in 1926 Hitler encouraged Ludendorff to run for Reich’s President, in the almost certain knowledge that he would lose, which he did, gaining only 1.1% percent of the vote. Depressed and dejected, Ludendorff never again posed a serious threat to Hitler’s leadership of the NSDAP or his preeminence in right-wing politics. Therefore by 1926, having removed two of the three chief rivals for party leadership, Hitler became one of the preeminent spokesman for the right in Germany. As Richard Evans declares, the “general had been displaced by the corporal.” (Evans 2004: 210). Now he could concentrate on gaining political power in Germany.

The moment came to apply all the lessons learned in the beer halls by 1928 and the Great Depression. By far the greatest lesson from the *putsch* was that political power could not be obtained without the support, or at least the neutrality of, the army. Hitler believed that political power, however achieved, had to be obtained legally. Hitler was absolutely clear about the end result: it must result in absolute power for himself. Hitler had not renounced the idea of securing power by force once in office, but there could be no participation in government without Hitler at the helm of state (Kershaw 1998: 218). As the world financial crisis ate away at the votes of the “dying middle” parties, it looked increasingly possible that the Nazis would enter the government in some form of coalition. Hitler, however, refused to enter any type of coalition government unless he received the chancellor’s office. President Hindenburg repeatedly refused this demand. In September 1930 the Nazi representation in the Reichstag jumped from 12 seats to 107. By 1932, the Nazi vote had climbed to 230 seats. Nevertheless, President Hindenburg refused to consider a Hitler-led government, instead pleading with him through various intermediaries to accept some junior position in a coalition cabinet.

Before 1923, Hitler might have considered such overtures from the Field Marshall an order and accepted without question a subordinate position in government. Lukacs has written that in all of his extant writings from the war period and before 1923, Hitler demonstrated a “doglike loyalty and deference to his officers and his country” (Lukacs 1997: 59-60). However, by 1933 Hitler had developed the confidence in himself and contempt to defy the general: it was to be all or nothing. This is remarkable since Nazi voting strength appeared to be declining by January 1933. In the November 1932 elections the Nazis lost votes, dropping to 196 seats in the Reichstag. Leaders in his own party started to panic and urged Hitler to accept any position offered in the government other than chancellor. Hitler still refused any coalition deal even though the party seemed on the verge of a split over the issue.

General von Schleicher, one of Hindenburg’s trusted advisors, then tried to outmaneuver Hitler by negotiating a deal with Gregor Strasser and his followers to join a government without Hitler. Strasser, the leader of the “intellectual” wing of the party, was no great fan of Hitler. News of the negotiations led to open dissension among the party leadership, and almost civil war between the Strasser and Hitler factions in the party. Party members grumbled against Hitler, declaring that they “had had enough of ‘a Party whose Leader does not know what he wants and has no program.’ ” (Kershaw 1987: 44-45).

Pressure from Schleicher and Hindenburg continued to mount, but Hitler still refused to be a part of any government of which he was not the head. Hitler then confronted Strasser and his followers. Through pleading and threats, Hitler slowly converted them to his position. Strasser, defeated, resigned all his offices and essentially left the party (Kershaw 1998: 399-402). Once in power, Hitler murdered Strasser, Schleicher, and Röhm during the “Blood Purge” of 30 June 1934.

Through single-minded determination and persistence, Hitler had won again. On 30 January 1933, Hindenburg, having exhausted all other options, appointed Hitler the head of a coalition government. Hindenburg and Franz von Papen, the two who orchestrated the deal appointing Hitler, now claimed that they had him cornered: within a few months, von Papen declared, “we will have pushed Hitler so far into a corner that he’ll squeak!” (Craig 1978: 569-570). How had Hitler become so sure of himself? How had the Lance Corporal developed the courage and determination to defy the Field Marshall?

Conclusion

This essay has suggested that Hitler's confidence and political tactics grew out of his experiences in Munich's beer halls in the 1920s. The cult of personality which he cultivated, his resolute role as the "Führer" which he went on to inflict on all of Germany, gradually developed out of these beer hall experiences as well. Hitler had played second fiddle to Ludendorff and the other right-wing leadership up until 1923 (Kershaw 1987: 9). As a result, the cause to which he had dedicated his life had almost been destroyed in the *putsch*, just when political power had seemed so close. By 1933 Hitler determined not to make the same mistakes again. Had Hitler accepted a subordinate position to von Papen or von Schleicher "he would have lost heavily in reputation and surrendered a good deal of the charisma that came from being the leader" (Evans 2004: 447). Kershaw takes this even further: "Had Gregor Strasser succeeded in splitting the party, bringing one part of it behind the Schleicher government, and joining the cabinet himself, the chances are that a Hitler takeover of power would never have occurred." Hitler's "aggressive obstinacy" as Kershaw describes it, paid off in 1933 when he writes that "the 'nobody from Vienna,' 'unknown soldier' beer hall demagogue. . . had now been placed in charge of government of one of the leading states in Europe" (Kershaw 1998: 423).

The latest research clearly demonstrates that the "aggressive obstinacy" which Kershaw identifies so clearly developed after numerous arguments, meetings, confrontations, episodes, brawls, and even failures in Munich's beer halls in the early 1920s. More than just venues where he could perfect his oratorical skills, Munich's beer halls represented crucial stations in Hitler's political formation and his path to power. Without these formative beer hall experiences, it can be argued that Hitler might have simply remained "the drummer" vacillating and anonymous, the corporal throwing his support to whatever dominant right-wing movement came his way. The new research demonstrates that Hitler's beer hall politics prepared him for his role as "Der Führer" of a vast right-wing movement, and propelled him to Germany's Reich's Chancellery in January 1933.

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