

THE CIVIL WAR WITHIN THE GERMAN NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY

BY GEN. LEON DEGRELLE

*"In just a few years Adolf Hitler has brought forth out of nowhere one of the most powerful organizations in the world. Victorious and eager for action, it now stands behind him, impelled by an irresistible dynamism." H.B. Gisevius, *Jusqu'à la lie* . . .*

—["To the Very Dregs . . ."], vol. I, p. 112

By the beginning of 1933, the millions of members of the SA were coming almost as often from the left as from the old right-wing organizations that were better regarded by the army chiefs. Gisevius continues:

The SA membership, whose numbers have greatly increased in the past few months, is made up at least a third of former members of the parties of the left. It is known with certainty that in the months of June and July of 1933 there were assault detachments formed almost entirely of communists. They were popularly known as *beefsteak detachments*, "brown on the outside and red on the inside." (*Ibid.* 115.)

Before victory, these SA men bursting with optimism and courage were absolutely indispensable. Several times a week they were called on to maintain order at meetings. As the strong arm of the party's propaganda, they gave a sound drubbing to opponents in the audience who got too obstreperous. They had been recruited from among the ardently patriotic youth of the nation. Also, in very large numbers, from the ranks of the unemployed. And likewise, in some instances, authentic no-goods were recruited.

Some over-ambitious go-getters had the appetites of ogres. As for the good-for-nothings, they meant to force their way into the middle class with clubs. Some leaders driven by ambition had been interested only in swelling the number of their contingents, since their own importance was thus automatically also increased, and brought hasty promotion to colonel or even general.



Adolf Hitler and Ernst Röhm in the summer of 1933. One year later Röhm would be dead. All in all, about 85 people were killed in what came to be known as the "Night of the Long Knives."

Their swift rise understandably scandalized the colonels and generals of the Reichswehr who had undergone half a century of toil in the old army.

Once the revolution had come to power, what indeed was Hitler going to do with these millions of idealists—including the reckless undesirables—when he already had six million unemployed workers on his hands? . . . Over and over again he had protested against the excessive increase in

the number of SA members. But the SA leaders had turned a deaf ear to his orders because they were too interested personally in holding on to the additional members. In short, here camped out on the fringes of the constitutional government under Hitler's control were 3 million semi-soldiers, some of them unassuming, devoted and disciplined, others brawlers or fanatics who were little inclined to return to dull legality.

Hitler had needed them. He felt great affection for them because many of them were old and valiant companions. He often forgave them their escapades. From time to time he would say in their justification: "The SA is not a school for young ladies." But he began to get annoyed when he heard disturbing tales of the unpleasant things some of them were doing.

The chief of these 3 million latter-day *lansquenets* (mercenary foot soldiers) was a former captain named Ernst Röhm. Had he created Hitler, as some have said? Hitler was a member of the DAP [German Workers Party] in 1919, before he had ever met Röhm. The latter was a heroic, badly disabled war veteran, very much the swash-buckler, who couldn't find his place in a defeated Germany. He drank hard and often. After November of 1919 he had continued his army service as the officer in charge in Munich of a military intelligence section. As an officer attached to the Second Infantry Brigade, he had secret funds at his disposal which he doled out to various rightist movements.

This role did not satisfy his dynamic nature. He progressed from nationalist organizations that were too peaceable to more turbulent nationalist movements. He organized secret stores of rifles, machine guns and munitions, and had even salvaged a few old cannons. Thus it was that Hitler had become acquainted with Röhm in the course of the year 1919, and he had then induced him to enroll in the DAP as number 623.

Röhm was hearty and communicative. A familiar camaraderie was established between Hitler and himself. They used the



Alfred Frauenfeld, shown above, is truly one of "the forgotten Nazis." Yet he was important in his day, serving, among other things, as the Gauleiter of Vienna (1930-1933).

familiar *du* with one another, but it had gone no further than that. Hitler had genius and had no need of Röhm to inspire him. If all Röhm had needed was for a man of his choosing to become a brilliant leader, he could have thought up 50 of them better able to achieve success in the immediate future (Gen. Ludendorff, for example) than the unknown and virtual ragamuffin that Hitler was in 1919.

It was thanks to his exceptional personality—and not because Röhm had manufactured a marionette—that Hitler, on July 21, 1921, had become the unquestioned master of the NSDAP [National Socialist German Worker's Party], successor to the original DAP, by 553 out of 554 votes. Röhm's vote had been just one among 553 votes. And then there was Hitler's eloquence: without that, there would never have been a National Socialist Germany. That was not a gift made by Röhm to the young "Führer" either.

Röhm was nonetheless a useful collaborator. Well known in Munich military circles, he was particularly fitted for resolving difficulties when the authorities tried to pick a quarrel with the first National Socialists, and he had been effective.

When the Marxists had used violence in

an attempt to terrorize the meetings of Hitler's party, it was Hitler, not Röhm, who had formed the first group of battlers—80 of them in all—that he himself led to the attack when the Reds broke into his meetings. And it was Göring, the famous commander of the Richthofen squadron—wearing the insignia of the Order of Merit round his neck, and far more celebrated than Röhm—who had received from Hitler the command of that first Sturmabteilung and the mission to step up its recruitment.

Göring being busy with 10 other missions, Röhm had succeeded him. He was a valorous group leader. He kept his men firmly in hand, was endowed with an instinct for combat, and he was at the same time a capable organizer. On the night of the Munich putsch in November of 1923, he had seized the premises of the Military Command, and he held out there for some hours after the putsch had failed.

While Hitler was spending 12 months in prison in 1924, Röhm's career had taken wings, benefiting, as in Ludendorff's case, from the wave of popularity brought about by the putsch and then by the sensation of Adolf Hitler's trial.

Röhm had been elected a National Socialist deputy, and for a time he played a lone hand. He had delayed for several weeks before throwing in his lot with Hitler again after the latter had been set free. He had not even attended the reunion meeting. The success Hitler had met with there and the growing strength of the renewed NSDAP brought Röhm back into the fold. But an important difference was quickly going to arise between Hitler and Röhm, involving two radically different conceptions of the aims assigned to the combat formations of the party. Röhm wanted to turn the SA into a military organization that would be virtually independent of the National Socialist movement.

For Hitler, on the other hand, the SA was to have the sole mission of enforcing National Socialism's rights in meeting-halls and in the streets. In 1925, this conflict, which had been latent for a long time, came to a head. Hitler dismissed Röhm, who withdrew without any scandal, and faithful but disconsolate, he left Europe and went off to become a lieutenant colonel in Bolivia, where he would remain for five years. The SA in the meantime had grown considerably larger without Röhm. In

IN MEMORIAM

TBR's copy editor, Andrew Gray, died in his sleep on August 29, 2001, after having suffered from pulmonary fibrosis for several years. Besides his editorial work, he had a lengthy career in the banking industry in America and Europe. Andrew was well known as a friend to historical Revisionism. He is best remembered for his translation of Richard Wagner's autobiography, *My Life*, which is currently the standard English translation of that work, published by Cambridge University Press. Generous until the end, just before his death he insisted upon ensuring that the TBR editorial staff had upgraded computer equipment, reimbursing TBR for their expenses for a new computer. Thanks, Andrew. You will be missed.

August of 1927, 20,000 of its members had marched in parade at the NSDAP Third Congress. Year by year it continued to expand and become more strongly structured. On September 14, 1930, Hitler's first great electoral victory had burst like a bomb: 107 deputies. The SA was prominently to be seen everywhere in the streets and was vigorously opening the way to the future.

Unable to direct everything himself, Hitler remembered Röhm, told himself that he must have calmed down in La Paz, and that perhaps he could recall him from his faraway Bolivia now that millions of Germans followed him, Hitler, personally. On October 1, 1930, Hitler summoned him. In La Paz, Röhm, his mind still vibrant with the Munich saga, immediately cast aside his stars and promotions. He had scarcely arrived in Munich when Hitler, who was also much moved by his return, named Röhm chief of staff of the SA, as well as of its privileged contingent, the SS, an elite corps created to form a defensive square around the Führer wherever he went.

In the bitterness of the great struggle from January 1931 to January 1933, the problem of the SA, whether political shock troops or future new army, had become blurred. It was not discussed. They were fighting. All the same, Hitler had never concealed from Röhm that he intended to maintain his basic position. In his eyes, the Reichswehr was the only army; the SA was the physical and political support of the movement. Inwardly, Röhm had not changed his opinion either. He had nothing but insults for the heads of the Reichswehr, even though they were the only ones at the time with the technical training without which no army is effective. Hitler was completely aware of that need. Gisevius writes:

Hitler wished to make the SA into the legal troops of the party as it were. . . . It was necessary to meet terror with terror, first in the meetings, then in the streets when necessary. But that wasn't enough for officer Röhm. Since 1918 his one dream had been the new national army. No amount of success seemed fast enough for him. No increase in the manpower of the SA seemed to him sufficient. (H.B. Gisevius, *op. cit.*, vol. I, 121 ff.)

Röhm had his plan: "In the first momentum of the seizure of power, the sooner he forced his way through the impenetrable



One of the earliest to join the German Workers Party was Ernst Röhm, a thuggish German army captain. Röhm was quick to recognize the crowd-pulling attraction of Hitler's personality.

thicket of juridical prescriptions and the obligations of foreign policy, the sooner his army of the revolution would become the national army of the future." (*Ibid.*) Despite everything, Hitler treated Röhm considerably.

Gisevius once again explains: "Hitler must take precautions on every side. He is still only the chancellor of a coalition government. He still has to consider decisions of the Council of Ministers, diplomatic protests, and even at times open resistance. Moreover the old marshal is always there." (*Ibid.*)

Röhm paid no heed to such considerations. If he accepted for the moment the commanders of the old army, he considered them old fogies: mummified skeletons with no social comprehension and an absolute lack of feeling for the common people. For them, a soldier was an instrument that

took orders, and that was all. In their view, he was in essence an inferior being. When someone like Gen. Reichenau, a convert to National Socialism, allowed himself to talk to a soldier in a friendly way after drill, or when he took part in competitive sports with the men—where the best man wins, not the one with the most dazzling gold braid—it shocked his fellow officers, who treated him as a demagogue.

The people's army that Röhm wanted to give Germany was a nation in arms, as in the time of the French Revolution. Moreover, he often whistled the *Marseillaise*, alluded to Carnot, and would have liked to give the SA the spirit of the *sansculottes*.

He went too far. He evoked the Red Army. Driven as he was by an essentially revolutionary spirit, he would have liked to

create a German Red Army; for as he himself said, he was more socialist than nationalist. He still agreed to tolerate maintenance of the army for the time being, on condition that it be taken over without delay. In truth, he would have much preferred to create his Red Army from scratch, thus making a clean break with a past of landed squires, which seemed to him terribly old-fashioned. He also blamed the army—and, he was not entirely wrong—for not having understood the imperatives of modern warfare during World War I, and in particular for rejecting the massive use of tanks. The blindness of the German general staff on that subject had unquestionably been one of the decisive factors in the defeat of the German Empire.

Since then those generals, like their French counterparts, had grown still more set on outmoded techniques, taking no interest in plans aimed at the formation of large armored units, nor in the creation of an air force designed for massive military actions. Röhm's diatribe was valid per se and would remain so right up to the end of World War II. In 1939, many of those generals enmeshed in the past would still deny the tactical possibilities of armored divisions and take no more than a passing interest in Göring's air fleet.

Yet how would Röhm have been able to modernize a new army from top to bottom? A soldier of fortune who had never received the training that might have fitted him for the job? Who didn't have the genius to invent it and was ignorant even of the possibilities of a war industry? Hitler would prove to be the one man capable of inventing a theory of modern warfare from start to finish, one centered around the tactical collaboration of large and powerful air and armored ground forces. He would have the iron will to impose that strategic revolution. He would create the tank divisions and the thousands of aircraft. He would have the flair for discovering the imaginative young officers like Guderian and Rommel who would apply his doctrine.

Hitler knew as well as Röhm that such

a military revolution was indispensable, but, aware of the obstacles, he didn't want to rush things. He believed there was some possibility that the experienced commanders of the Reichswehr would understand. He was mistaken about a number of them. Bound up in their prejudices, and behind the times, they would not only completely fail to understand the new doctrine but would sabotage it. In order to succeed in transforming the military machine in spite of the obstacles and lack of comprehension, Hitler counted on a transfusion of new blood into the army, thanks to the National Socialist youth, that would change minds and create thousands of officers who understood and who would impart a true social cohesion to an army become part of the greater German community. Alas, the time given him—the six years from 1933 to 1939—would not be quite enough.

Hitler, even before 1933, had the long considered prudence of a responsible future head of state. Röhm, on the other hand, was impetuosity personified and too violent in his talk when he had been drinking, which was often the case. An army of the people? Both of them wanted it, Hitler just as much as Röhm. But how to create it?

On that their plans differed totally. Sooner or later they were bound to clash. Röhm proclaimed, "I am the Scharnhorst of the new army. The stock itself must be revolutionary. It is impossible to graft onto dead wood." The problem was much more complex than that.

Hitler saw far beyond Röhm's mugs of beer. The army he was thinking of would require something other than match sticks on a café table to be invincible. In addition to the willingness, the strength and the faith of the people, there would have to be cadres and brains, plans and a strategy. The army and the SA were not to be in opposition to each other but to form a double team. The problem to be solved lay there, not in a crazy duel. The collision between Röhm and Hitler was inevitable. ♦



BEFORE HITLER . . .

Georg Ritter von Schönerer, a left-wing Liberal deputy in the Austrian Parliament (1842-1921), is known as the spiritual godfather of National Socialism. Schönerer founded the nationalistic German People's Party in 1881. In 1882, Schönerer helped to draft the famous "Linz program." Under this plan, the Slavic parts of the Austrian empire (Bucovina, Galicia and Dalmatia) would be detached, and German would become the official state language. Anti-Semitism was not part of the program. In fact, Schönerer's chief collaborators on the document, the historian Heinrich Freidjung and the Socialist leader Viktor Adler, were both Jewish by ethnicity. Initially, Schönerer was merely against a "preponderance" of Jewish influence in Austrian public life. By 1883, however, he was demanding the dismissal of all Jewish teachers. But in 1887 Schönerer's effectiveness was sharply reduced when a Viennese newspaper published documentary proof that his wife had a Jewish ancestor.

Leon Degrelle was an individual of exceptional intellect, dedicated to Western culture. He fought not only for his country but for the survival of Christian Europe, preventing the continent from being inundated by Stalin's savage hordes. What Gen. Degrelle has to say, as an eyewitness to some of the key events in the history of the 20th century, is vastly important within the historical and factual context of his time and has great relevance to the continuing struggle today for the survival of civilization as we know it.