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Part 3

THE TRAGEDY OF THE SA (1933/34)

January 30, 1933, seemed to fulfill all the hopes of the revolutionary fighters: Victory had been won, the Führer had become Reich Chancellor; the NSDAP had become the leading political force of the German nation, its Storm Detachment was swelling irresistibly - by June 1934, more than three million German men were already proudly wearing the brown shirt of the SA; the Chief of Staff was Reich Minister and, at the Reich Party Congress of Victory in September 1933, was symbolically singled out as the strongest personality after Hitler and almost equal to the Führer. And yet, behind the scenes in the SA, justified discontent was growing:

Too little was said about the realization and implementation of the National Socialist revolution, too much about a "national uprising" that was now complete. An alliance and compromise with the still powerful reaction in the Reichswehr, administration and economy, however, was not victory, was only half a success. The struggle of the SA had always turned against the Red Front AND reaction, ever since the first National Socialist revolutionaries had been betrayed and shot down by reaction on November 9, 1923. After January 30, 1933, the Red Front had been consistently eliminated and finally defeated, the national revolution had been victorious - but where was the socialist revolution, which should and must now consistently eliminate reaction?

Even the Führer's quoted New Year's message, for all its palpable warmth and recognition, sounded peculiarly unclear and washed out:

The Reichswehr should continue to protect the Reich externally, but the SA internally? What could that mean in concrete terms? Protection on the inside, that would actually have to mean control over the entire apparatus of state security and its reorganization. But there could be no question of this - although the SA was repeatedly used as an "auxiliary police force" and a number of SA leaders were appointed police chiefs, the police and security apparatus was by no means placed under the control of the SA leadership as a whole, as would have been necessary and necessary for the SA to be able to really fulfill this task. Would Röhm have had to take over the Ministry of the Interior for this purpose? - There was no talk of that either.

The SA leadership was equally skeptical about the "division of labor" with the Reichswehr:

The National Socialist revolutionaries around Ernst Röhm were almost all former front-line officers and later Freikorps leaders - political soldiers who had been forced out of the Reichswehr and had long since understood that this seemingly apolitical force was in fact a highly political instrument of power for reaction. Ernst Röhm and his staff understood the logic of the revolution, that such a revolution is only really secured when it has created its own revolutionary army!

In the first half of 1934, therefore, internal tensions increasingly intensified: The SA demanded a "second revolution" against reaction and, as a decisive step toward this end, the transformation of the SA into an armed people's militia, as well as the transfer of suitable leaders and sub-leaders as officers and NCOs to the Reichswehr in order to be able to control it politically. The combination of both elements - the creation of a highly technical, powerful and rapidly deployable small National Socialist elite force with the underpinnings of a people's militia comprising practically all men capable of military service - was to give rise to the envisaged National Socialist people's army under the leadership of the SA staff and to wrest the decisive means of power from the hands of reaction.

Consequently, the old double character of the SA became more and more apparent again, which, according to its self-conception, always remained an unrestricted subdivision of the party, but now, in addition, not only wanted to become a military unit again, but also the revolutionary people's army of the future! For this, fi-

nally, it had been selected and promoted by Röhm already in 1919. In the end, this is how he had always understood his task as SA leader. And this also corresponded - as mentioned - to the logic of the NSDAP as a revolutionary party, which had made the claim: "The party commands the state!"

In its branches, the party had already established a "shadow state" during the period of struggle, which was to penetrate the bourgeois state apparatus after the revolution and transform it in the National Socialist sense. And in this shadow state, the SA had always held the role of the future people's army. Neither the SA leadership nor the ordinary SA fighter now understood why, after the seizure of power, this claim was increasingly sacrificed at all levels - but especially with regard to the task of the SA - in favor of a compromise and a division of power and tasks with reaction.

Supported by his three million SA fighters, who, even unarmed, were already numerically the strongest power factor in the Reich, Ernst Röhm began to counteract: Anticipating the expected second phase of the revolution, he began to transform and reorganize the SA into a military formation, and through spectacular appeals by SA groups throughout the Reich, speeches, proclamations and marches, he exerted increasing pressure. He declared:

" "If philistines think that it is enough that the state apparatus has received a different sign, that the national revolution has already lasted too long, we are happy to agree with them for once; it is indeed high time that the national revolution ceases and that it becomes the national socialist one. Whether it suits them or not, we will continue our struggle. When they finally understand what is at stake, with them, if they don't want to, without them, and if it has to be, against them."

And finally, on April 18, 1934, the open declaration of war against the reaction took place in an unprecedented unambiguity, when Ernst Röhm stated in a speech:

"We, however, have not made a national revolution, but a national socialist revolution, whereby we place special emphasis on the word socialist!" Where these national forces have in the meantime learned socialism in addition to their national thinking and practice it, they may continue to march with us. But where they think that we would, for their sake, make even the slightest concession to our consistent socialist will, they are gravely mistaken.

Reaction and revolution are natural mortal enemies. There are no bridges over

and over, because one excludes the other. In an incomprehensible leniency, the new regime in Germany, when it took power, did not ruthlessly clean up with the carriers and henchmen of the old and even older system. Today there are people in official positions who have not yet felt a whiff of the spirit of the National Socialist revolution. We do not blame them for having an attitude that has been overtaken by developments, although we do not consider it fortunate that they have been eliminated instead of being put on an equal footing. But we will break their necks firmly and mercilessly if they dare to confirm this reactionary attitude."

Such and similar proclamations, repeated by the dozens during these months, increasingly led to rumors that Ernst Röhm was planning a putsch - that the second revolution he thought necessary was to be triggered by an uprising of the SA. But this would completely misjudge Röhm:

Ernst Röhm was always a loyal and faithful follower of the Führer - admittedly not a Byzantine yes-man and sycophant, but a self-confident and self-thinking friend. With the arming of the SA elite troops (staff guards), the reorganization of the SA as a military force, and with his appeals and proclamations, Röhm was not preparing a coup d'état, which after all could hardly be staged in such an open and provocative manner. It was always clear that the second phase of the revolution was to be initiated not against Adolf Hitler but with him; but it was also always clear that Röhm would resign, as he had done in 1924, and return his commission if the Führer decided against him. Clear proof of this is that Röhm had not resigned from the Bolivian army on his return to Germany, but had only taken leave of absence - in other words, had left his way back open in case he was unable to carry through his ideas! Neither on June 30, 1934, nor for any later time, therefore, an uprising of the SA was threatening: the "Röhm Putsch" was in reality a putsch against Ernst Röhm - made possible by a war of nerves and intrigues of the reaction by which the Führer was deceived.

However, no cheap criticism of Adolf Hitler should be made at this point: Röhm did not want to coup, but he did want to exert pressure - including pressure on the Führer, in order to win him over to his ideas. This alone was a violation of the "basic law" of the SA, which is not allowed to pursue its own policy, but must always remain a fighting subdivision of the party and subordinate to its strategy and tactics. This violation would certainly have justified a dismissal of the chief of staff. It was also irresponsible in such a tense domestic political atmosphere, in which no SA putsch was possible, but a reactionary Reichswehr putsch was constantly possible and was also threatened on various occasions. But such a coup

could have led to civil war!

Deceived by putsch rumors and intrigues of the reaction, strengthened by rival Röhm opponents in the party, put under pressure by the chief of staff and threatened by reactionary restoration efforts, Hitler's actions on June 30, 1934, served in his eyes to prevent an imminent civil war. Against this background, the execution of the SA leaders becomes understandable. One cannot and must not want to make judgments about guilt and tragedy from the comfortable armchair of the historical observer, fifty years later!

But one can draw lessons for the present and the future from historical experiences - as we have already done with the first tragedy of the SA on November 9, 1923: The underlying tension of the SA's dual character - military or purely political force - was twice discharged in dramatic events: November 9, 1923, and June 30, 1934. Both times, the SA was at the height of its power, and both times it lost that power in bloody settlements that left it no chance. The lessons learned, however, are very different: After 1923, the decision to strip the SA of its military character and to transform it into a party army that was exclusively effective in propaganda was the right one. At that time, Ernst Röhm was wrong. The SA's task was not to defeat the embattled system militarily, but to gather the fighting elite of the nation in its ranks and, through the example of its SA spirit, to win over the broad masses of the people to National Socialism in order to make a legal revolution possible for the NSDAP. This is how we had understood the SA tradition, and this is how we apply it to the present time of struggle.

On June 30, 1934, however, the National Socialist movement was already in power, the SA had essentially fulfilled its task. In such a situation, however, it is now a matter of imbuing all institutions and bastions of power of the bourgeois state with the National Socialist spirit, transforming them and placing them under the authority of the party. This includes, above all, all formations of internal and external state security. These areas are the classical tasks of a victorious SA and the fighting elite of the nation organized in it! Without such a struggle against the power bastions of bourgeois reaction, a revolution remains unfinished and must fail and collapse under the great burdens, as it eventually did. So this time Ernst Röhm was right.

The consistent and merciless struggle against reaction is therefore the seventh demand in the SA tradition. In view of the bloody and tragic history of the SA and its great chief of staff, we stand quite consciously and inexorably in this SA tradition,

which is clearly expressed in the words of Ernst Röhm already quoted:

"Reaction and revolution are natural mortal enemies. There are no bridges over and across, because one excludes the other."







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