1923-02-02 US NARA M336 Roll 18 pages 623-625 Report of R.D. Murphy, U.S. Vice Consul in Munich on Bavarian Political Situation

p.623:

“I have the honor to report the following concerning the Bavarian political situation during the past week:

Landtag, Government and Extraordinary Powers.

The oft-postponed national convention of the National Socialists Workingmen’s Party (Hitler’s organization) was held at Munich on January 27, 28 and 29in an orderly manner unattended by excesses of any kind and with no attempt on the government. Party representatives from the south as well as the north of Germany together with members from Austria and Czecho-Slovakia filled to overflowing twelve large halls.

A proclamation of a special condition of affairs by the Cabinet under the provisions of which the Secretary of the interior was named State Commissioner and clothed with extraordinary powers for the protection of the Government and the maintenance of peace and order best indicates the apprehension felt by the government that Hitler’s followers would attempt a coup d’etat. The Secretary for the Interior had previously requested Hitler to indefinitely postpone the convention. The latter replied that postponement was impossible. Whereupon the proclamation was issued and the Secretary forbade all open-air assemblies and limited the number of indoor meetings to six instead of twelve. Hitler in return announced to the government that notwithstanding the government’s edict he intended to carry out the party’s programme as planned, and if the government prevented by force he would resist in like manner and assured the authorities the results would be bloody. The government thereupon, at the intervention of von Kahr, the recognized leader of the patriotic societies, helped by the sympathetic attitude of Polizei-President Nortz, an avowed royalist, weakened, and announced that the indoor meetings could be held. Hitler, however, insisted on the open-air assemblies also, and he finally carried his point and the programme was completely followed as originally planned.

The proclamation of an extraordinary condition, the stationing of an extra battalion of Reichswehr in and about Munich and the vacillation of the government were induced by fear and alarm and apparently not warranted by conditions. The Minister President yesterday addressed the Landtag in explanation of the government’s much criticized motion, and though the Chamber accorded him a vote of confidence, his collation has been seriously weakened. Several newspapers announced the retirement of the Secretary for the Interior, and when he made a public denial of the report, openly declared that when the report was published it was taken for granted that after his shameful exhibition of weakness and vacillation his resignation was the only thing possible.

The government’s mistake has furnished Hitler and his party, as well as the United Socialists and the Communists new ammunition and ground for attack of which the best advantage is being taken.

The convention itself, the centre of the teapot tempest, was well attended, orderly, free from violence, and the speeches merely a review of the usual subjects of anti-semitism, necessity for a strong government, nationalism and resistance to the ‘enemy.’ The only new point uncovered was the opposition evinced to the new national ‘Einheitsfront’ – a united Germany. Hitler’s party refuses, and in order to continue to exist because of its past record and its anti-semitic platform it must refuse, to have anything in common with the United Socialists or the Communists.

A State’s President Possible.

The government’s predicament and weakened position has again renewed the agitation for the creation of the office of President of the State of Bavaria. The office would be elective and the tenure a definite period of years, possibly seven. Under the present system the sins and weakness of the government are borne by the Minister President who is likewise Minister for Foreign Affairs. In case of a lack of confidence the Minister President withdraws and the other ministers remain leaving the government without a responsible head. The selection of a new Minister President is then in the hands of the leaders of the majority parties. Much comment has been caused because of the fact that party leaders sidestep the responsible positions but control the situation through their party position. The principal function of the State’s President would be in case of resignation to call upon someone to form a new cabinet. Ex-Crown prince Rupprecht and Dr. von Kahr (Middle Party) are the most prominently mentioned candidates for the proposed position.