1923-05-13 US NARA M336 Roll 19 pages 45-51 Report by T. Lay and R.D. Murphy about Political Movement in Bavaria

May Day at Munich

Preparations for an orderly celebration of this annual Socialist fete day had proceeded quietly enough . . . During the celebration approximately 2,000 national Socialist (Hitler) ‘shock troops’ fully outfitted with side arms, steel helmets, uniforms, etc. several bomb throwers and machine guns were held in check and prevented from colliding with Socialist groups by a detachment of Reichswehr in armored motor lorries, and by the police. Due to excellent police control and supervision, only a few minor street brawls, netting one killed and several wounded, occurred.

A counter demonstration in the form of a monster mass meeting was held by the National Socialists in the evening. It passed off uneventfully and proved a disappointment to the hot-bloods of Hitler’s organization. An incident worthy of mention in connection with the section of this report dealing with the swing of public opinion against Hitler happened at the meeting during Hitler’s usual inflammatory address. A feminine member of the Landtag, democratic fraction, was observed in the audience taking stenographic notes. She was ordered to refrain but refused at which the overzealous guards forcibly took the notes away, subjected the Lantag member to a physical examination and arrest, and generally conducted themselves in an insulting manner. The matter caused much indignation in the Landtag and especially antagonized the democratic group. The subject is mentioned because it is typical of many similar incidents which have done much to render Hitler’s movement unpopular with the conservative element in Bavaria. The showing made by the Hitlerites on May Day has gone far to discredit and weaken its organization.

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Swing of Public Opinion Against Hitler

Former Bavarian Premier von Kahr now President of the Government of Upper Bavaria (which district includes Munich) as recognized leader of the patriotic societies in Bavaria delivered an impressive appeal on May 9, 1923, at a crowded meeting of the association ‘Bavaria and the Reich,’ of which he is honorary president, calling upon his audience and all of Bavaria to forget factional and party strife and to unanimously support the Bavarian and Federal Governments. The speech is important because of von Kahr’s political strength, his position as an avowed loyalist and former Premier of Bavaria, and his popularity in monarchistic, nationalistic and student circles. As reported in previous despatches he is a close friend of Ludendorff, and it will be remembered that at the time of Hindenburg’s visit to Bavaria, the former field marshall was entertained and lodged at von Kahr’s home. Von Kahr is the strongest candidate, in the event Rupprecht should not desire the position, for the position of State’s President, and will probably be elected to that office if the coalition parties ever summon enough strength to amend the constitution.

While the speech was along the lines of the usual appeal to unity, that is to say, the usual assertions were made that the enemy stood neither to the left nor to the right but on the Rhine, and while it contained much criticism of the communistic element and the working classes who are unsympathetic to the old order of things, its principal importance lies in its criticism of Hitler’s organization, the National Socialist German Workmen’s Party, and the fact that it was timed two days in advance of the official government appeal and emergency ordinance mentioned elsewhere in this dispatch. Von Kahr, among other things, said: ‘Many feel today that they are called upon to guide the reins of government and in their ignorance of the relevancy of things and of the effectiveness of political negotiation believe themselves capable of correcting the destiny and psychology of a nation with fiery speech or several machine guns.’ The foregoing and other parts of the speech clearly apply to Hitler although the latter’s name was not specifically mentioned. It confirms the belief of the writer that the Ntaional Socialist movement is on the wane, and it probably marks the return of Escherich as leader and moulder of the patriotic movement. Escherich will be remembered as founder of the ‘Orgesch’ (Organization Escherich) which until two years ago was regarded as one of the most powerful patriotic and legalist societies in Germany. Escherich was also the leader of the Einwohnerwehr, the voluntary home protective league organized in Bavaria after the demolition of the Eisner regime.

Escherich has expressed himself to us as bitterly opposed to Hitler (obviously because of Hitler’s increased political strength which interferes with Escherich’s personal ambition) and as cconfident of a return of the so-called patriotic movement to his leadership for the reasons that the people are wearied of Hitler’s inflammatory agitation which yields no results and offers nothing constructive; his anti-semitic campaign has made many enemies; the rowdy-like conduct of many of his youthful following has antagonized order-loving members of the community. Hitler has failed to make serious inroads on the United Socialist ranks. His funds are reported very low and the financial status of the organization precarious because of large demands made upon it by the two-thousand odd ‘shock troops’ many of whom are maintained on a salary basis by the party. The fiasco of May Day, described elsewhere in this report, has also done much to tarnish the stars of Hitler.

In addition to the above the leaders of the Bavarian Peoples Party (the majority coalition group) have slowly come to a realization of the politcal potentiality and competitive strength of Hitler, who has been thus far patronized and his organization regarded as a useful exhaust for the discontent of a troublesome element. If mass meetings and lurid speeches, play at military organization, drilling in the country, etc. would appease the ultra-patriots and die-hards, the government felt the movement should be fostered within reasonable bounds and a friendly attitude of understanding adopted to deflect the discontent from itself.

The time has arrived, however, when , to quote the Bavarian Premier, it is a question of whether the state is sovereign, or an independent organization is to be permitted to usurp the function of government.

On May 11, 1923, the Bavarian Cabinet, as a direct consequence of the demonstrations on May 1st issued a Proclamation and Emergency Ordinance – advance information of which was furnished our Embassy in Berlin

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Party to blame for this condition of affairs is a certain element (Hitler’s group) who instead of supporting a patriotic government, as the former Einwohnerwehr (Escherich) did, see fit to follow their own political ideas, the object of which is often unclear, and the methods employed in execution impossible.

The State cannot permit usurpation of its authority by private organizations, and will not countenance opposition on their part to its regulations whenever such dissatisfy or displease.

The experiences of May Day serve to illustrate the unbelievable confusionof political factionalism expressing itself in exremeist meetings and public demonstrations, which the government must decisively eradicate.

With this purpose in view the emergency ordinance has been passed furnishing the authorities with legal means for finally combatting the abuse of public assembly, misuse of the streets for dangerous parades and demonstrations, the despicable poisoning of public opinion by unlimited distortion and lies, and shameful treasonable conduct.

The government is decided to take the necessary measures to preserve its authority and to protect public order.

National Socialists and Reichswehr.

Interesting disclosures have recently been made by the Socialist ‘Munchener Post’ concerning the close liaison apparently existing between certain officers of the Reichswehr and the National Socialists (Hitler) Organization.