

Berlin, 1 March 1932

You will have seen in the papers that the Reichstag held a session of four days last week. The present Government, as you know, has only the most slender and unstable majority in the House. Indeed except for the reluctant 'toleration' of the Social-Democrats, it would be in a hopeless minority. As a result the Reichstag is almost on permanent holidays; its law-making functions are exercised dictatorially by the Government by means of the Emergency Decrees (see my despatch of 15th Oct. pp 2 and 3¹). It is only summoned in cases of dire necessity and then only for a very short time. It must be admitted that the behaviour of a large section of the House during the recent session makes most Germans feel that the more rarely it is convened the better for German prestige. The National Socialists and the Communists engaged in veritable competitions of rowdiness. During the Chancellor's great speech the Nazis maintained a continual howl of interruptions. Yet the result was a much greater victory for Brüning than the meagre majority of twenty six which he obtained in the final vote. The 'Nazis' gave an exhibition not merely of rudeness but also of utter incompetence and they seem to have disgusted even their allies the Nationalists (Deutschnationale) if one can judge from the Press of the latter.

The reason for the session was to secure the approval of the Reichstag for holding the first ballot in the presidential election on March 13th. In effect the speeches were all electioneering speeches. It emerged clearly that all the political parties represented in the Reichstag will support Hindenburg with the exception of the Communists, and the so-called 'national opposition', the Nazis and Nationalists.

It was expected that these two parties would be able to agree on a joint candidate who would secure all their votes at the first ballot and who would obviously be a National-Socialist, in view of the tremendous numerical superiority of that party. But at the last moment the Nationalists and the 'Stahlhelm', a politico-military organisation in close contact with them, put forward a candidate of their own, Herr von Duesterberg, vice-president of the Stahlhelm. I thought at first that his candidature was designed to draw votes from Hindenburg in the first ballot, as there must be a number of old Nationalists who would not vote for a National-Socialist in preference to Hindenburg. But the anger displayed in the Nazi Press and their violent abuse of the Nationalists would make one believe that after all it is a case of a definite split in the opposition ranks. Indeed the 'national opposition' is an extraordinary coalition: a party of old conservative landholders, retired officers and former officials allied with a party which is revolutionary in programme as well as in temper.

¹ Not printed.

After a certain amount of hesitation Herr Hitler has allowed himself to be nominated for the presidency. No doubt some of his hesitation was due to the strong possibility of his defeat. There was further the obstacle that up to a few days ago he was not a German citizen at all. You will have read in the papers of the extraordinary and ludicrous attempts to secure him German citizenship without his having to apply for it in the ordinary way, which procedure for some reason or other he regarded as beneath his dignity. As an official in the service of any State Government receives German nationality by the mere fact of entering the civil service, a number of attempts were made by Nazi Ministers to smuggle him in by this method. It was proposed that he should become successively a teacher of art, a head constable in an obscure Thuringian village, and Professor of Education in the State University of Brunswick. As each of these projects collapsed in turn, owing to the excusable opposition of his future colleagues, the Government of Brunswick at last hit on the plan of making him Attaché to its Legation to the Reich. Accordingly since the day before yesterday, when he swore allegiance to the Constitution which he is never tired of denouncing, he is Herr Regierungsrat Hitler.

Of course the issue lies between him and Hindenburg. The latter's supporters are straining every effort to secure for him an absolute majority of all the votes cast at the first ballot on March 13. But this seems to be unlikely and the final contest between them in the second ballot will probably be close enough. Some experienced observers in the Diplomatic Corps think that Hindenburg may eventually win by between two and three million votes. But I should hesitate to make any prophecy at all, knowing the tremendous wave of radicalism which the present hard times are causing throughout every section of the German people.

[signed] D.A. Binchy.