Hess: Rudolf

Positions:
Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP (Deputy of Hitler as leader of the Nazi Party), 22 April 1933-1941.
Reichsminister ohne Geschäftsbereich (Reich Minister without Portfolio), 1 December 1936-1941.
Mitglied des Gehörnchen Kabinett (Member of the Secret Cabinet Council), 4 February 1933-1934.
Mitglied des Ministerrates für die Reichsverteidigung (Member of the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich), 30 August 1933-1941.
Member of the Reichstag, March 1933-1941.
SS-Obervorstandführer, 1933 (?)-1941.

Birth date and place: 26 April 1896, Alexandria, Egypt.
Religion: Protestant

Family History:
Hess' grandfather emigrated from Unniedel (Fichtelgebirge) to Alexandria, Egypt, where he established an import business, which subject's father, Fritz Hess, took over. Hess' mother was Klara Kühn of Holz. S. Hess married Else Proehl of Hannover in 1927. They have one son, born in 1937.

Education:
For six years Hess attended the German school in Alexandria. From 1905 to 1908 he was educated by a private tutor and subsequently was sent to Germany by his parents, where he attended the high school (Realschule) at Godesburg a/ma. (1909-1911). Although particularly interested in mathematics and the natural sciences, he attended business college in Neuchatel, Switzerland, for a year and from 1912 until the outbreak of World War I served as a commercial apprenticeship in Hamburg in order to prepare himself to take over his father's business in Alexandria.

Work and Political History:
At the outbreak of World War I Hess joined 1st Bavarian Infantry Regiment as a voluntary. His regiment (the so-called List Regiment) suffered extremely high casualties in the fighting on the Western front. Hess was wounded in June 1916 near Verdun and again in 1917, when he received a shot in the lung. Promoted to the rank of Lieutenant, he became a member of the 28th Bavarian Infantry Reserve Regiment in Munich.
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In 1910 he volunteered for the Air Corps. He received pilot's training at the Fliegerschule I in Lechfeld and the Jagdstaffelchule Himmelstal. In the fall of 1913 he joined the Jagdstaffel 35 (Fighter Squadron 35) on the Western front.

After Germany's defeat in November 1918, Hess went to Munich, where he soon joined the nationalist, anti-communist Thulesgesellschaft and the Freikorps Don. He participated in the fight against the Bavarian Republic of 1918 (Weimarer Republik) and narrowly escaped being shot as a hostag. In the course of a fight against Social Democrats on 1 May 1919 he was wounded in the leg. In 1920 Hess enrolled at the University of Munich as a student of economic history and geopolitics (under Haushofer). In June 1920 he joined the Nazi Party, and in its very beginnings, and soon became one of Hitler's closest personal collaborators.

Then in November 1921 Social Democrats protested against a Nazi Party meeting in the Munich Hofbräuhaus. Hess provoked a brawl, and as a result suffered a head injury. The armed Nazi bands present in this and similar meetings were organized into the SA (Sturmabteilung) following a counterattack. Hess became one of the active leaders of the SA. He organized a special group within the SA, composed primarily of students, the so-called NS Studentenbundeschaft (NS Student Organization of One Hundred), later called NS Studentenbattalion (NS Student Battalion).

Hess played a prominent part in the putsch of 9 November 1923. During the night of November 5, Hess was among those Bavarian political leaders as hostages. Together with Hitler he entered the Hofbräuhaus on the 9th in order to arrest the Bavarian Interior Minister, Gustav von Kahr, and then drove to Southern Bavaria with the SA (Sturmabteilung) of the Interior, Schneyer, and a first minister as his hostages. Thus he did not participate in the march to the Feldherrenhalle, which ended with Hitler's precipitate flight. The Nazi plot to overthrow the Bavarian government having failed, Hess escaped across the mountains into Austria. However, he returned to Germany shortly afterwards and was condemned to one and a half years imprisonment (Vorwurfszelle) for attempted high treason. He served seven and a half months of his sentence in the Landsberg fortress together with Hitler. Hitler dictated parts of his book, Mein Kampf, to Hess during this time. It is alleged by some that Karl Haushofer's concept of geopolitics thus, via his student Hess, found its way into Mein Kampf.

Released from Landsberg at the end of 1924, Hess served for a short while as assistant to Haushofer in the latter's capacity as head of the Deutsche Akademie (German Academy) in Munich, but later in the year became Hitler's private secretary and personal adjutant, a position he retained until 1933. Not until 1932 did he receive any official position in the NSDAP.

Through his constant close collaboration with Hitler, Hess won the Führer's complete confidence and eventually rose to a position of great power under the Nazi regime. In the years before the Nazis came to power, he accompanied Hitler on most of his speaking tours, wrote propaganda pamphlets and acted as his personal adviser. When Gregor Strasser broke with Hitler late in 1932, thus throwing into to disarray the Nazi Party entirely, Hitler reorganized the party under the leadership of the Central Political Commission (Zentralpolitischer Kommissions), and Hess was appointed its head. In this capacity he had to supervise the political activities of the Nazi party factions in the state assemblies, and to determine questions of general political strategy.
On 1 January 1933 Hess took part in the meeting between Hitler and Paper... a. Lhc house o.C the banker, Jurt von Schröder, which paved the way for Hitler's appointment as chancellor on 30 January 1933. 2/ In March 1933 Hess was elected a member of the Reichstag, which soon afterwards passed the Früchtegutschutzgesetz, which made the power of the Nazis in Germany secure. He held the rank of SS Obergruppenführer at least from 1933 on. 26/

His regime firmly established, Hitler rewarded Hess for his services in bringing the Nazi regime to power, by appointing him his Deputy, i.e., in Hitler's capacities as head of the Nazi Party (Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP). 20/ Hess was the supreme head of the Nazi Party with authority to act on behalf of Hitler in all matters concerning party policy. He thus not only had overall supervision of all party offices, party formations and affiliated organizations, (with power to reorganize them to issue rules and regulations as to membership, activities, funds, etc.) but had an entire staff of his own (Stab des Stellvertreters des Führers) to see that his policies were carried out.

Among the many measures adopted by Hess as deputy head of the Nazi Party only a few can be mentioned here. On 3 May 1933, for example, he authorized Robert Ley (q.v.) to establish the German Labor Front. 11/ On 10 July 1933 he decreed the establishment of the Hochschulkommission der NSDAP (University Commission of the NSDAP) which was to function under his direct supervision. The Commission was to act as a liaison between the Nazi Party and all ministries which had any part in university administration. It was designed to prevent the appointment of any persons but reliable Nazis to university positions and to insure that Nazi principles were reflected in German educational policy. 12/ Hess extended his influence over university life further, when he announced on 10 July 1933 that the National-schulischer Deutscher Studentenbund (NS German Students' Association) would be henceforth under his control. On 11 November 1933, he decreed that the NSDStB was to be the only student organization permitted to function in Germany. 13/ On 11 May 1934 Hess established the Studentenkampfhilfe, an organization of university graduates, in order to obtain financial support for the activities of the NSDStB. In May 1937 it was decreed that no other organization of university graduates would henceforth be allowed to exist in Germany. The Nazi organization was renamed NS Altbund (NS Association of University Graduates) on 5 May 1939. 14/ Another decree of Hess (21 July 1933) established compulsory membership in the NS Deutschbund (NS University Professors' Association) for all University Professors. 15/

Another Nazi organization which owed its existence to Hess' initiative was the Arbeitsgemeinschaft katholischer Deutscher (Association of Catholic Germans), founded by Franz T apk (q.v.) which represented the active Nazi elements among the Catholic population of Germany and was to stamp out political opposition in Catholic circles. 16/ On 14 April 1933 Hess established the Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des NS Schrifttums (Commission for the Protection of NS Literature), whose task it was to censor all publications relating to National Socialist history, ideology, organization or leadership, so as to prevent any possible "misrepresentation" of the Nazi movement in the eyes of the public. 17/

Hess' power to determine membership qualifications in the Nazi Party and its affiliated organizations has already been mentioned. On 21 May 1934, for example, he decreed that former members of Free Mason organizations could not hold leading positions in the Party or the SA. 10/ On 27 January 1936 he imposed a ban on further membership in the NS Frauenarch (NS Women's Organization). 18/
It was Hess, furthermore, who every year at the Nürnberg Party Congresses or other solemn party occasions administered the oath of allegiance to the newly appointed Polizei-Bezirksleiter (police district leaders) of the Nazi party, to members of the Hitler Youth and BPH, and administered to membership in the Nazi party, etc. After the annexation of Austria in 1938, Hess on 24 July installed the seven new Gauleiters of Austria. Following the annexation of the Czech Sudeten area in the fall of 1938 he formally received the Sudetendeutsche Partei (the Nazi party of the Sudeten Germans) into the NSDAP at a huge political rally at Reichenberg, the new Gauehauptstadt (district capital).

As Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP Hess represented Hitler at many public occasions, party rallies, congresses, etc., serving as his faithful mouthpiece in presenting Nazi policies to the public. He was ever ready to defend Hitler's policies, and to demand blind obedience to the Führer from his followers. In connection with the purge of 30 June 1934, Hess played a rather important part. He urged Hitler to take steps against Röhm, gathering "evidence" as to Röhm's contemplated insurrection. Through Hess, Hitler made an offer of reconciliation to Röhm, if Röhm would accept Hitler's terms. One source reports, furthermore, that next to Goring, Hess was one of the main executioners of the purge and subsequently was the first to defend the events of 30 June 1934 in public. Together with Stabschef (Chief of Staff) Lutze, he reorganized the SA after the "liquidation" of Röhm and his followers.

Hess' influence, however, was by no means limited to party matters. The NSDAP was not a political party in the accepted sense. By the law of 30 July 1933 the only legal party in Germany, it was the powerful tool of the Nazi ruling group in dominating the German people. Time and again the Nazis proclaimed that the NSDAP was the supreme source of public authority in Germany, that it was the bearer of the idea of the state. Through a series of measures giving high Nazi Party officials control over governmental matters, the hold of the party on the government was assured. Hess, as Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP, received increasingly broad powers, giving him control in matters of government as well as party policy.

On 29 June 1933 Hess was authorized to take part in the sessions of the Reich Cabinet, and on 3 December 1933 under the "Law to assure the unity of Party and State" (Gesetz zur Sicherung der Einheit von Partei und Staat), Hess was given rank of Reichsmarschall ohne Portfolio (Reich Marshal without Portfolio). By orders of Hitler of 27 July 1931 and 6 April 1935 Hess was authorized to participate in the formulation of legislation by all departments of the Reich government as well as by the state governments (Landelagenverwaltung). He was also to take part in the preparation of "Hiterordnungen" (personal decrees of Hitler). The order was designed to prevent the enactment of any legislation in Germany, which did not accord with the policies of the Nazi Party. Hess previously the so-called Verbindungshut (liaison staff), established and directed by Hess, had referred the wishes of the Nazi Party to the government agencies, thus serving as a more informal check of the party on governmental activities. In particular Hess signed the anti-Semitic legislation (the so-called Nürnberg Laws) of 1935.

Hess' control was extended to municipal affairs through the new Gemeinderecht of 1933 (Law concerning Municipalities). The office of Beauftragter der NSDAP (Delegate of the NSDAP) in each community was established. The Beauftragter was to check on the activities of mayors, town councilors and other local officials in and prevent the adoption of any measures objectionable from the Nazi point of view. It was left to Hess to determine who was to serve as Beauftragter of the NSDAP and to issue directives as to their activities.
To leave no aspect of government activity free from Nazi control, two further orders of Hitler (21 September 1935, 10 July 1937) stipulated that no Junker (government official) or Abteilungsführer (Leader of the Labor Service) could be appointed without the consent of Hess or his authorized representatives.

In February 1933 Hitler established the Geheime Räte Deutscher Ministerien (Secret Cabinet Council), which, according to official announcement, was to advise Hitler on matters of foreign policy. Hess was appointed a member of this Council, which shared responsibility for framing the Nazi policies of foreign aggression.

The council was looking for an excuse to invade Austria. Hess, therefore devised a scheme, whereby Nazi agents disguised as Austrian patriots, were to assassinate the German Ambassador, von Papen (q.v.), thus furnishing the necessary pretext for Nazi interference. The scheme failed, because the Austrian police discovered the document containing Hess' plan (the so-called R. H. document) in a raid on the Kabinett verteidigung (Military Cabinet Department), of the Austrian government. The scheme was then abandoned, and Hess was appointed a member of the Ministertafel der Verteidigung (Ministers' Council for Defense), established by decree of Hitler of 30 August 1933 for the "unified direction of the government and of economy." 2) In this council of six members supreme legislative as well as executive authority was concentrated. The decree had the force of law even without the signature of Hitler. The power of the Council extended to the regional administrative level. It was represented by a Reichverteidigungskommissar (Reich Defense Commissioner) or a Reichsverteidigungsinspekteur (Army Corps Area), who coordinated defense activities and was authorized to give orders to every administrative agency in his area. Usually the Reichsführer SS was appointed Reich Defense Commissioner.

In 1938 Hess' political career came to an unexpected end. On 10 July the world was startled by the announcement that the Deputy of the Führer had landed in Scotland, parachuting from a twin-motor Messerschmitt which crashed. Hess is aptly interned in an insane asylum in Wales. He is on the list of twenty-four top Nazi war criminals to be tried in Nuremberg. 3)


9/ Reichstagshandbuch, 1933.


15/ Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 857.

16/ Ruhle, op. cit., pp. 36-130.


20/ Ruhle, op. cit., 1934-1937, passim. See also Volz, op. cit.,

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22/ Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, as well as Rühl's, Das Writte Reich, contains reprints of a good many of his speeches.

23/ Hitler's Reichstag speech on the events of 30 June 1934, Rühl, op. cit., II, 239. Ibid., 249-250

24/ Gesetze gegen Neubildung der Parteien, 14 July 1933 (RGBl I, 479), Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 816.


27/ Rühl, op. cit., XII, 49-50.

28/ NS Jahrbuch, 1941 Volz, op. cit., p. 53.


30/ OSS Source F, August 1945.

31/ Reichsgesetzblatt 1939, I 1539.


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