

## The Press and the Power: The Hearsts 1934 at the Nazi Party Rally in Nuremberg



(Collage: *rijo*)

### Background

Due to the global economic crisis, in 1934 William Randolph Hearst I (1863 - 1951), the blueprint for Orson Welles' 1941 film character "Citizen Kane", as a political personality and his media empire probably were beyond the peak of their influence on American society already, but what he did and what he wrote still counted.

After his empire comprising of 28 newspapers, well-known magazines such as "Cosmopolitan", "Good Housekeeping", "Town and Country" and "Harper's Bazaar", two news services and a film company had reached its heights of circulation and revenue about 1928, Black Friday hit the papers hardest. Therefore the Hearst Corporation had to be reorganized in 1936 by court mandate. From this point, W.R. Hearst was just another employee in his own company.

In the meantime, on the other side of the big pond another charismatic figure was on the rise: Adolf Hitler. Immediately after legally obtaining power in January 1933, the Nazis started the ruthless persecution of their political and "racial" opponents: In February 1933 the arson of the *Reichstag* building delivered the pretext for the incarceration of communists and social-democrats. One month later, the Nazis took over regional and local governments and as the

first concentration camp Dachau started its operations. On April 1, 1933, a nationwide boycott against Jewish businesses was organized by the crudest anti-Semite in the Nazi party, Franconia's *Gauleiter* Julius Streicher. In May 1933 the book burnings spread from Berlin to all major German cities. Since July no other parties besides the *NSDAP* were allowed to exist. The purge culminated in the delusively so-called *Röhm-Putsch* in June / July 1934 when killer commandos of the SS reached out for the remnants of opposition within and outside the party, settling old scores terminally by the dozen.

What's the connection between those two stories of rise and fall? First, as a recorded fact Hearst and Hitler were business partners for the latter being a contracted author of Hearst Corp. since *NSDAP* became the second biggest German party. By that he was in good, at least famous company with Winston Churchill, David Lloyd George, and his Italian colleague Benito Mussolini. As a byproduct of the events described below, another ideologically more suspicious relationship evolved: In his book "Hearst Over Hollywood" author Louis Pizzitola revealed that the old magnate struck a deal with the *Führer* following a similar arrangement with fascist Italy to the result that his newsreels carried Nazi-produced footage about events in Germany without any critical comments.

### **In Germany**

This cooperation was agreed upon in September 1934 when "The Chief" W.R. Hearst, his oldest son George Randolph I (1904 - 1972) and their numerous entourage embarked on a trip to Europe, invited as guests of honor by the Nazi party to visit its rally in Nuremberg (Sep. 5 - 10). The yellow press tycoon used the opportunity for a personal interview with Hitler in Berlin after allegedly checking with Jewish leaders at home to make sure that the visit would prove beneficial to their suffering German brethren in faith. From this encounter there are anecdotes to illustrate the confrontation between the stern American democrat and humanitarian and the brutal dictator: Replying to Hitler's question why he was so misunderstood by the American press, Hearst supposedly said: "Because Americans believe in democracy and are averse to dictatorship." He also told Hitler: "You can be a world leader, you can secure a century of peace, but in order to be a world leader you must stop the persecution of the German Jews." We cannot verify the source of these statements but most probably it were either "The Chief" himself or his newspapers.

Other statements are easier to believe because they were distributed worldwide by the German press agency *Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro* without any objections by the person cited. They were recorded after the Hearst clan came to Nuremberg, occupied 10 rooms - due to the list of

reservations Göring ordered only two - in the first class *Grand Hotel* and attended the propaganda rumpus in the old town and also at the megalomaniac rally grounds under construction at the outskirts of the city. Though the presence of Hearst senior himself is not on the records, it can be taken for granted after he obviously had no problem having Nazis around him. “The Chief” might have chosen a low profile strategy during his stay in Nuremberg not to give his critics and competitors back home more to write about his increasingly estranging political views. If so it makes perfect sense that not he himself, but his son George Randolph was quoted in an article in the local newspaper *Fränkischer Kurier* of Sep. 10, 1934, as follows:

*Mr. Hearst Junior Visiting Nuremberg Party Rally*

*Mr. George Hearst, the oldest son of the famous American newspaper publisher, attended the appeal of the SA and SS at the Luitpold-Arena, as well as the parade before the Führer on Adolf-Hitler-Platz. In a conversation which George Hearst granted a representative of the DNB [Deutsches Nachrichten-Büro], he said the following about his impressions of the Party’s Congress in Nuremberg: “Six years ago I saw Germany for the last time. Since then Adolf Hitler took over Germany. The hours in Nuremberg gave me the chance to gather a deep insight into the German people and German youth. I will take home a great impression”.*

Besides the question whether or not G.R. Hearst accompanied his father to Nuremberg, for his cautious words to the German reporter surely he had W.R.’s blessing. Another hint that the statement was not completely out of the family’s and therefore Hearst Corp.’s line is the fact that their name re-appeared in Nuremberg twelve years later - in favor of the Nazi criminals then indicted here: During the session of the IMT on July 22, 1946, an extract from the *Völkischer Beobachter* Nazi newspaper was introduced as a piece of evidence, containing a quotation from W.R. Hearst to the defendant Alfred Rosenberg on September 3, 1934, according to the protocol “to the effect that when that distinguished gentleman was in Germany three years ago [1931] there was the greatest disorder there; today, [...] under Hitler’s leadership, Germany is a country of order.” It was called to the Tribunal’s attention “that this date was about nine weeks after what even Himmler has described as the appalling murders of 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1934.”

## **Reflections**

So by what demons W.R. Hearst was bedeviled in the autumn of 1934 to laude publicly a murderous and evil regime, e.g. writing under his own byline that “[Hitler had] restored char-

acter and courage. Hitler gave hope and confidence. He established order and unity of purpose”?

Naivety or a lack of information fail as an excuse because the Hearsts must have been the best informed people in America, second only to the president at that time. Also that a hard-boiled newspaper man like G.R. Hearst succumbed to the propaganda show in Nuremberg can be ruled out.

In hindsight it appears to be more likely that “The Chief” and the *Führer* shared certain opinions, first and foremost the one expressed in Hitler’s cynical saying that “the bigger the lie, the more people believe it.” The man who “routinely invented sensational stories, faked interviews, ran phony pictures and distorted real events” (Martin Lee and Norman Solomon in their 1990 book “Unreliable Sources”) could have easily agreed on that. His message to a correspondent waiting for the outbreak of hostilities between the USA and Cuba in 1898 shows him to be of a most similar way of thinking: “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.” The ‘technique’ of Hearst’s newspapers once was described pointedly as “willing by deliberate and shameful lies, made out of whole cloth, to stir nations to enmity and drive them to murderous war.” (Upton Sinclair in his 1919 book “The Brass Check”) - or to close their eyes, as one might add in reference to the USA and Nazi Germany.

In addition to their lust for mass manipulation there was another shared view between the men, their fierce anticommunism. In 1935, the socialist American journalist John Spivak described Hearst: “[...] he started his anti-Red drive after he returned from a visit to Germany where he had conferred with Hitler and other Nazi leaders. Shortly after his arrival home he stated in a front page editorial that this country need not fear Fascism, that Fascism can come only when a country is menaced by Communism.”

More unsettling than the pathetic hubris of an aging press tycoon loosing control but still thinking that he can influence a beast like Hitler, fantasizing about a face-to-face level on which both parties meet, are the expression of an abysmal undemocratic stance and carelessness about the rule of the law. What mindset must one have to make such statements, at the same time supporting President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal, at least temporarily? Probably those flirtations with power have been a late reflection of Hearst’s own ambitions to enter politics - as an exponent of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party - which failed several times.

Benevolent writers give 1938 as the year when W.R. Hearst understood the real nature of the Nazi regime witnessing the cruel events of *Kristallnacht*. But one can ask legitimately how much of a change took place within those four years. Surely not in the aims, only in the means

of the perpetrators and their violent resolution. Yet in 1934 there had been victims to their drive for “order and unity of purpose” and the Hearsts knew about them. Of course Chamberlain and Daladier, the British and French statesmen who signed the Munich Treaty which exposed Czechoslovakia to the *Führer's* insatiable gluttony for other countries in 1938 did the same, but they did not praise Germany's fascist system.

Any public sympathy for the Nazis after 1938 would have meant social and economic suicide in the USA. Thus ending this frivolous liaison between press and power is not necessarily a sign of a fundamental change of mind. For this reason the question has to be left unanswered whether Hearst and his son who as a Vice-President of the corporation played an important role in its postwar development, ever were disenchanted with their dreams of impressively strong leaders restoring character and courage in their people - at any cost.

*Gerhard Jochem*

### Sources and Literature

- Newspaper article in *Fränkischer Kurier*, edition of September 10, 1934, p. 12.
- Excerpts from: “The Sins of the Father” by Ronald *Kessler*.
- Helmut M. *Müller*: Schlaglichter deutscher Geschichte. Bonn 1990.
- Remembering “The Chief”: A PBS interview by Terence Smith with author David *Nasaw*, September 7, 2000.
- Nuremberg City Archives, record group C 7/I, file no. 917.
- Website “Hearst Over Hollywood” by Louis *Pizzitola*.
- Interview by David Walsh with Louis *Pizzitola*, author of “Hearst Over Hollywood”, April 20, 2005, at World Socialist Web Site.
- Protocols of the Trial of German Major War Criminals sitting at Nuremberg, Germany: Monday, July 22, 1946.
- Newspaper article by John *Spivak* in “New Masses”, edition of February 5, 1935.
- Wikipedia article on William Randolph Hearst.
- Wikipedia article on George Randolph Hearst.

[Index\\*](#)

[Home\\*](#)