

Background: Joseph Goebbels book *The Battle for Berlin* was an account of the beginning of the Nazi Party in Berlin. He presents an idealized portrait of courageous idealists fighting for a noble cause. This section describes a battle in a meeting the Nazis had organized in the Wedding district of Berlin, a communist stronghold. Goebbels chose the location as a provocation to the Marxists. He wanted a fight, and got one. It the classic Nazi account of such a fight.

The source: Joseph Goebbels, *Kampf um Berlin* (Munich: Verlag Franz Eher, 1934), beginning on p. 63. The book was first published in 1932.

The Battle in the Pharus Hall

It was a provocation the likes of which Berlin had never seen. Marxism thinks it presumptuous if a person with nationalistic sentiments expresses them in a working class district. And in Wedding [**a working class district of Berlin**]?! Red Wedding belongs to the proletariat! It had been that way for decades, and no one had the courage to object and prove that was not the case.

And the Pharus Hall? — that was the uncontested domain of the K.P.D. [**the Communist Party of Germany**]. They held their party congresses there. Almost every week they gathered their most loyal and active members there. Here one had heard only talk of world revolution and international class solidarity. Here of all places the NSDAP scheduled its next meeting.

It was an open declaration of war. We meant it that way and the opponent understood it that way. Our party members were jubilant. Everything was now at stake. The future of the Berlin movement would be risked boldly and bravely. It was win or lose!

The decisive day of 11 February [**1927**] neared. The communist press outdid itself with blood-thirsty threats. We would face a tough reception, we would not want to come back. At the labor and relief offices, people openly said that we would be beaten to a bloody pulp.

We had no idea of the danger that threatened us then. I myself did not yet know Marxism well enough to foresee the possible consequences. I shrugged my shoulders as I read the dark prose of the red press and awaited expectantly the decisive evening.

Around 8 p.m. we drove in an old rusty car from the city center to Wedding. A cold gray mist hung under a starless sky. Our hearts were bursting with impatience and expectation.

As we drove down Müllerstraße it was already clear that the evening did not bode well. Groups of dark figures stood on every street corner. They apparently planned to teach our party members a bloody lesson before they even got to the meeting.

Dark masses of people stood outside the Pharus Hall, expressing their rage and hate with loud and impudent threats.

The leader of the protective forces cleared a way for us and reported briefly that the hall had been packed since 7:15 p.m. and had been closed by police. About two-thirds of the audience were Red Front fighters. That was what we wanted. There would be a decision. We were ready to give it all we had.

Entering the hall, we encountered a warm, stifling aroma of beer and tobacco. The hall was hot. A lively roar of voices filled the hall. People were packed in tightly. We reached the podium only with difficulty.

No sooner was I recognized than hundreds of voices filled with rage and revenge thundered in my ears: "Bloodhound! Murderer of workers!" Those were the mildest words they shouted. But a welcoming group of some party members and S.A. Men answered with passion. Excited battle cries sounded from the platform. I saw immediately that we were a minority, but a minority determined to fight, and therefore win.

It was still our custom then for an S.A. leader to chair all of the party's public meetings. Here too. Tall as a tree he stood up front and asked for silence with his upraised arm. That was easier said than done. Mocking laughter was the answer. Insults flew toward the platform from every corner of the room. People growled and screamed and raged. There were world revolutionaries scattered about who apparently had gained the courage they needed by drinking. It was impossible to quiet the hall. The class-conscious proletariat had not come to discuss but to fight, to break things up, to put an end to the Fascist specter with callused workers' fists.

We were not uncertain, even for a moment. We also knew that if the enemy did not succeed this time in what he had threatened, the future success of the movement in Berlin was assured.

Fifteen or twenty S.A. and S.S. men stood before the platform in uniforms and arm bands, an impudent and direct provocation to the Red Front fighters. Behind me was a select group of reliable people ready at any moment to risk their lives to defend me from the onrushing red mob with brutal force

The communists made an obvious mistake in their tactics. They had scattered small groups throughout the hall, but clumped most of the rest in the right rear of the hall. I recognized immediately that there was the center of unrest, and if anything was to be done, we first had to deal ruthlessly with it. Whenever the chair tried to open the meeting, a dark chap stood up on a stool and shouted "Point of Order!" Hundreds of others yelled the same after him.

If one takes from the mass their leader, or also their seducer, they are leaderless and easily controlled. Our tactic therefore was to silence this cowardly troublemaker at any cost. He felt secure back there, surrounded by his comrades. We tried to do this peacefully a few times. The chair shouted over the uproar: "There will be discussion afterward! But we determine the rules of order!"

That was an ineffective attempt at an unsuitable object. The screamer wanted to throw the meeting into confusion by his endless shouts and bring things to the boiling point. Then a general melee would result.

As our efforts to bring the meeting to order peacefully proved unsuccessful, I took the head of the defensive forces to the side, and immediately after groups of his men slipped through the thundering communist masses. Before the astonished and surprised Red Front troops realized what was happening, our comrades had hauled the troublemaker down from his stool and brought him through the raging crowd to the podium. That was unexpected, but what followed was no surprise. A beer glass flew through the air and crashed to the floor. That was the signal for the first major meeting hall battle. Chairs were broken and legs ripped from tables. Glasses and bottles suddenly appeared and all hell broke loose. The battle raged for ten minutes. Glasses, bottles, table and chair legs flew randomly through the air. A deafening roar rose; the red beast was set free and wanted its victims.

At first it looked as if we were lost. The communist attack was sudden and explosive, completely unexpected. But soon the S.A. and S.S. men distributed throughout the hall and in front of the platform recovered from their surprise and counterattacked with bold courage. It quickly became clear that although the Communist Party had masses behind it, these masses became cowards when faced with a firmly disciplined and determined opponent. They ran. In short order the red mob that had come to break up our meeting had been driven from the hall. The order that could not be secured by good will was gained by brute force.

Usually one is not aware of the stages of a meeting hall battle. Only later does one recall them. I still remember a scene that I will never forget; on the podium stood a young S.A. man whom I did not know. He was hurling his missiles into the on-coming red mob. Suddenly a beer glass thrown from the distance hit him on the head. A wide stream of blood ran down his face. He sank with a cry. After a few seconds he stood up again, grabbed water bottle from the table and threw it into the hall, where it clattered against the head of an opponent.

The face of this young man is engraved in my memory. This lightning-fast moment is unforgettable. This gravely-wounded S.A. man would soon, and indeed for all times, become my most reliable and loyal comrade.

Only after the red mob had been driven howling, growling and cursing from the field could one tell how serious and costly the battle had been. Ten lay in their blood on the platform, most with head injuries, two with severe concussions. The table and stairs to the platform were covered in blood. The whole hall resembled a field of ruins.

In the midst of this bloody and ruined wasteland, our tree-high S.A. leader resumed his place and declared with iron calm: "The meeting will continue. The speaker has the floor."

Never before or since have I spoken under such dramatic conditions. Behind me, groaning in pain and bleeding, were seriously injured S.A. comrades. Around me were broken chair legs, shattered beer glasses and blood. The whole meeting was icily silent.

We lacked then a medical corps. Since we were in a proletarian district, we had to have our seriously wounded carried out by so-called worker volunteers. There were scenes outdoors of unimaginable inhumanity. The bestial people who were supposedly fighting for universal brotherhood insulted our poor and defenseless injured with phrases like: "Isn't that pig dead yet?"

Under such conditions it was impossible to give a coherent speech. Scarcely had I begun to speak when another group of volunteers entered the hall to carry off a seriously wounded S.A. man on a stretcher. One of them, encountering the brutal apostles of humanity outside the door and their unflattering and crude language, shouted for me in desperation. His voice could be heard loudly and unmistakably on the platform I interrupted my speech and went through the hall, where there were still scattered communist commando groups. Still surprised by what had happened, they stood quietly and shyly to the side. I bade farewell to the seriously wounded S.A. comrades.

At the end of my speech, I spoke for the first time of the unknown S.A. man.

An amusing and satisfying episode of this bloody battle should also be mentioned. When the discussion period was announced, a pathetic chap who claimed to be a member of the Young German Order stood up. He gave an emotional appeal for brotherhood and peace between the classes, and complained passionately about the useless immorality of all this bloodshed, and announced that only in unity was there strength. As he then bowed to the meeting and prepared to launch into a patriotic poem to conclude his noble nonsense, the crowd laughed loudly when an honest S.A. man made the appropriate interruption: "Shut up, you little birthday orator!"

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That amusing intermezzo brought the battle of the Pharus Hall to an end. The police had cleared the street outside. The S.A. and S.S. left without any difficulty. A decisive day in the history of the National Socialist movement in Berlin was behind us.