

Nazi popularity grew partly due to Hitler's power as an orator, speaking frequently at party rallies, to play on the dissatisfactions of Germans in the decades following WWI. In the following selection from *I knew Hitler-The Story of a Nazi who Escaped the Blood Purge* (1937), Kurt G.W. Ludecke, an early supporter of Hitler who later broke with the Nazis, describes Hitler's ability to mesmerize his audience and employ his understanding of mass psychology at these rallies, which grew in popularity and frequency in the 1930's .

...with banners flying, their bands playing stirring German marches, they were greeted with tremendous cheers. An excited, expectant crowd was now filling the beautiful square to the last inch and overflowing into surrounding streets. They were well over a hundred thousand I was close enough to see Hitler's face, watch every change in his expression, hear every word he said. When the man stepped forward on the platform, there was almost no applause. He stood silent for a moment. Then he began to speak, quietly and ingratiatingly at first. Before long his voice had risen to a hoarse shriek that gave an extraordinary effect of an intensity of feeling. There were many high-pitched, rasping notes Critically I studied this slight, pale man, his brown hair parted on one side and falling again and again over his sweating brow. Threatening and beseeching (pleading), with small, pleading hands and flaming, steel-blue eyes, he had the look of a fanatic. Presently my critical faculty (critical thinking) was swept away. Leaning from the tribune as if he were trying to impel his inner self into the consciousness of all these thousands, he was holding the masses, and me with them, under a hypnotic spell by the sheer force of his conviction (belief, strength of belief). He urged the revival of German honor and manhood with a blast of words that seemed to cleanse...It was clear that I was feeling the exaltation of the emotional response now surging up toward him from his thousands of hearers. His voice rising to passionate climaxes, he finished his speech with an anthem of hate against the "*Novembedings*" (German leaders who had agreed to the "humiliating" terms of the Versailles Treaty imposed on them by the winning countries after WWI) and a pledge of undying love for the Fatherland. "Germany must be free!" was his final defiant slogan. Then two last words that were like the sting of a lash: "*Deutschland Erwache!*" Awake, Germany! There was thunderous applause. Then the masses took a solemn oath "to save Germany in Bavaria from Bolshevism. (An alternative expression for Communism, based on the Bolsheviks who had led a successful communist revolution in Russia in 1917) " I do not know how to describe the emotions that swept over me as I heard this man. His words were like a scourge (whip). When he spoke of the disgrace of Germany, I felt ready to spring on any enemy. His appeal to German manhood was like a call to arms, the gospel he preached a sacred truth, he seemed another Luther. I forgot everything but the man; then, glancing round, I saw that his magnetism was holding these thousands as one. Of course I was ripe for this experience. I was a man of thirty-two, weary of disgust and disillusionment, a wanderer seeking a cause; a patriot without a channel for his patriotism, a yearner after the heroic without a hero. The intense will of the man, the passion of his sincerity seemed to flow from him into me. I experienced an exaltation that could be likened only to religious conversion. I felt sure that no one who had heard Hitler that afternoon could doubt that he was the man of destiny, the vitalizing force in the future of Germany. The masses who had streamed into the Koenigsplatz (public square) with a stern sense of national humiliation seemed to be going forth renewed. The bands struck up, the thousands began to move away. I knew my search was ended. I had found myself, my leader, and my cause.

-What about the style of Hitler's speaking is persuasive to many Germans?

-What about the content of Hitler's speeches at these rallies is persuasive to many Germans?

-How does listening to Hitler speak at a mass rally make Ludecke feel?

-Why do you think he describes his feelings as a loss of critical thinking, saying, "my critical faculty was swept away"?

-Review: Consider Ludecke's description of himself at this time and consider why he might have been particularly vulnerable to Hitler's arguments. (This question, paired with one telling piece of this writing, was a warm-up)

