[**Putsch and shove**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1726245/putsch-and-shove)

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NEARLY 100 years ago, a bunch of radicalised, extreme-right Bavarians launched an audacious attempt to capture power locally, with a dream of subsequently extending it across Germany. The November 1923 plot, which has gone down in history as the Munich beer hall putsch, was partly inspired by Benito Mussolini’s successful march on Rome a year earlier.

Newly fascist Italy offered a role model, but the Bavarian authorities foiled the coup attempt. Among the nine men arrested was their ring leader, a World War I corporal by the name of Adolf Hitler. He was sentenced to five years in prison, the most lenient sentence possible given the charges against him, and served merely eight months — during which he began dictating Mein Kampf to his secretary, Rudolf Hess. His other key associates at the time included Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler.

Fewer than 10 years later, they were all in power — in Germany, not just Bavaria. Hitler remained chancellor for arguably the most tumultuous dozen years in modern European history.

That history should serve as a reminder why it might be a mistake to dismiss lightly the far-right plot foiled in Thuringia last week.

Ninety years after Nazism, what’s Europe’s future?

On the face of it, it comes across as a classic example of history repeating itself as farce. It appears to have drawn its strength from a segment of the Reichsbürger community, whose disparate adherents share the belief that post-World War II Germany is essentially a corporation established by the Western allies, rather than a sovereign state.

If there’s any truth beneath that ostensibly absurd proposition, it certainly does not apply to Germany alone — the US would be a more striking example. Besides, the Mussolini regime is frequently cited as the earliest archetype of corporate statism in Europe.

Perhaps a far more viable contender for opprobrium today, from both the far right and what remains of the left, albeit not necessarily on the same grounds, is economic neoliberalism, which superseded varying degrees of social democracy across much of the west in the Reagan-Thatcher and Clinton-Blair eras. That poses a problem on the extreme right for those who still view Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan as ideological icons.

But then, the myopia extends to a refusal to recognise that the scattershot (and scatterbrained) Trumpian philosophy is part of the problem, rather than any kind of solution. But with other alternatives to the woes of rampant corporate capitalism derided as utopian fantasies, too many of those at the receiving end tend to place their faith in authoritarian alternatives that promise much but are likely to deliver little.

It comes as no surprise that Germany is the largest consumer of QAnon conspiracy theories outside the Anglophone world, and that Donald Trump — whose German ancestors were known as the Drumpfs — is viewed as something of an ideal. Alongside, not surprisingly, is Vladimir Putin — although there is no evidence that the Russian state responded to appeals for assistance from the associates of Heinrich XIII. The self-styled 71-year-old scion — dubbed ‘putsch prince’ by the German media — comes across as the figurehead of a crazy conspiracy, 25 of whose alleged adherents were arrested last week after a nationwide German hunt involving 3,000 officers searched 150 properties, including some in Italy and Austria.

What’s particularly worrying is that his adherents included a current member of the elite German special forces, a former policeman and judge, and a former MP for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland party, whose insider knowledge of parliament was intended to facilitate a smooth takeover. Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Angela Merkel’s unimpressive but not particularly offensive replacement, was among those potentially headed for the chop.

He wasn’t the only one. There were other deaths that were “bound to happen”, according to intercepted phone calls.

What’s alarming is that all too many of the German officials talking to the international press prefer to do so on conditions of anonymity. It has been reported that further arrests are imminent, but at the same time there are indications that there was no serious threat to the German state. At least not immediately. Who knows what lies in store 10 years hence?

Nazism in the 1930s was a response to the Versailles settlement and the vagaries of the Weimar Republic. But by the time Hitler came to power, fascism was well entrenched in Europe. A century later, there’s the ‘post-fascist’ Giorgia Meloni in Italy, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, fairly far-right governments in the Czech Republic and Poland, and Putin in Russia. Not to mention extremist tendencies from France to Sweden.

What Europe might look like a decade hence if putsch comes to shove in Germany or elsewhere is impossible to say. But right across the continent, there are signs of how the consequences of neoliberalism might play out. If history doesn’t repeat itself, it might rhyme. And it won’t be a pretty picture.

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