

**MODEL VERSION: ANALYSIS OF A POLITICAL SPEECH****Otto Wels (SPD) on the Enabling Act addressing the Reichstag in the Kroll Opera House, 23rd March 1933 Otto Wels addressing the Reichstag**

The **source** is a *primary source*, a *political speech*, and was delivered on 23rd March 1933 in the *Kroll Opera House in Berlin* which served as parliament house at that time because *the Reichstag building had burnt down on the 27th February and could not be used*. On that day Hitler wanted to have the "Enabling Act" passed by a two-third majority of the Reichstag which would allow him to pass laws without the consent of the Reichstag. Otto Wels was the leader of the SPD in the Reichstag and used the opportunity to speak to the Reichstag and also to the German public in order to declare the SPD's opposition to the Enabling Act as well as to the persecutions that had taken place since the burning of the Reichstag. His language can be described as *grave and dramatic* which supports his overall message by giving urgency and gravity to his commitment to democratic principles.

In the **first paragraph** of this excerpt Otto Wels insists that *their liberty can be taken away but not their honour*. With this he wants to say that *the Social Democrats will stick to their convictions and not give in to the intimidations of the National Socialists*. He also refers to the persecution of Social Democrats that had taken place since *the burning of the Reichstag, which according to the Nazis had been burnt down by Communists*. The Decree for the Protection of the People and the State had allowed *the abolition of civil rights and the arrest of thousands of Communists and Social Democrats*. Therefore he clearly refuses to sign the Enabling Act. This statement is mainly addressed to *the Reichstag and the new government* but also to *the people of Germany who were supposed to understand that there was a democratic alternative to Nazi rule*.

Wels **then** states that never before control has been eliminated by elected representatives of the people to such an extent as it is happening at the moment and is supposed to happen even further with the Enabling Act. The Enabling Act gave Hitler the power to *rule without the Reichstag and even pass laws that were not in accordance with the constitution*. Wels also refers to the restriction of the *press* which made it difficult for other parties to campaign freely. Wels regards the *omnipotence* of the government as *undemocratic* and thinks that the restrictions of the political opponents make Hitler's takeover *illegitimate*.

Acknowledging the fact that the National Socialists *in fact had the power to rule at the moment*, Wels still insists that the people have a *sense of right and wrong* which is also a political force. He declares that the Social Democrats will *not stop to appeal to the people's sense of right and wrong*. With this statement Wels makes clear that he regards the takeover of the National Socialists as *illegal* because it is not in accordance with the democratic spirit of the constitution. He also expresses his hope that *the German people will reclaim their democratic rights and get rid of the National Socialists as soon as possible*.

The **fourth paragraph** deals with the Weimar Constitution. Wels stresses the fact that it is not *a socialist constitution which the Social Democrats would have preferred* but nevertheless the Social Democrats still adhere to the principles of *the state under the rule of law, equal rights and social rights*. He mentions the constitution and lists those *democratic* principles because he wants to remind *the people of Germany* of the legal basis of the Weimar Republic, which he thinks is being destroyed *by the Nazis*. And he wants them to know that there are members of parliament who *still believe in democracy and who are not scared to say so despite the threats of the National Socialists*.

**Finally**, Otto Wels directly addresses *Hitler and the National Socialists* and announces that *the Enabling Act will not give them the power to destroy the eternal idea of democracy and its values*. With this he warns the National Socialists that *their power will only be temporary and that the democratic idea will survive their rule*. He then greets the persecuted and suppressed people in the German Reich praising their steadfastness, loyalty, courage and optimism which will guarantee a brighter future. Here Wels sends a signal *not only to the*

