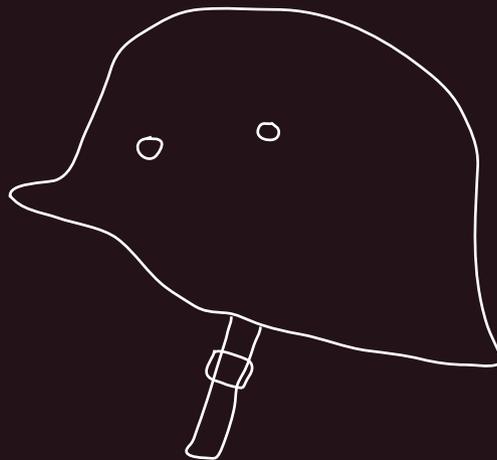




NELSON
MODERNHISTORY

GERMANY

1918–1945



K J MASON

SERIES EDITOR: TONY TAYLOR



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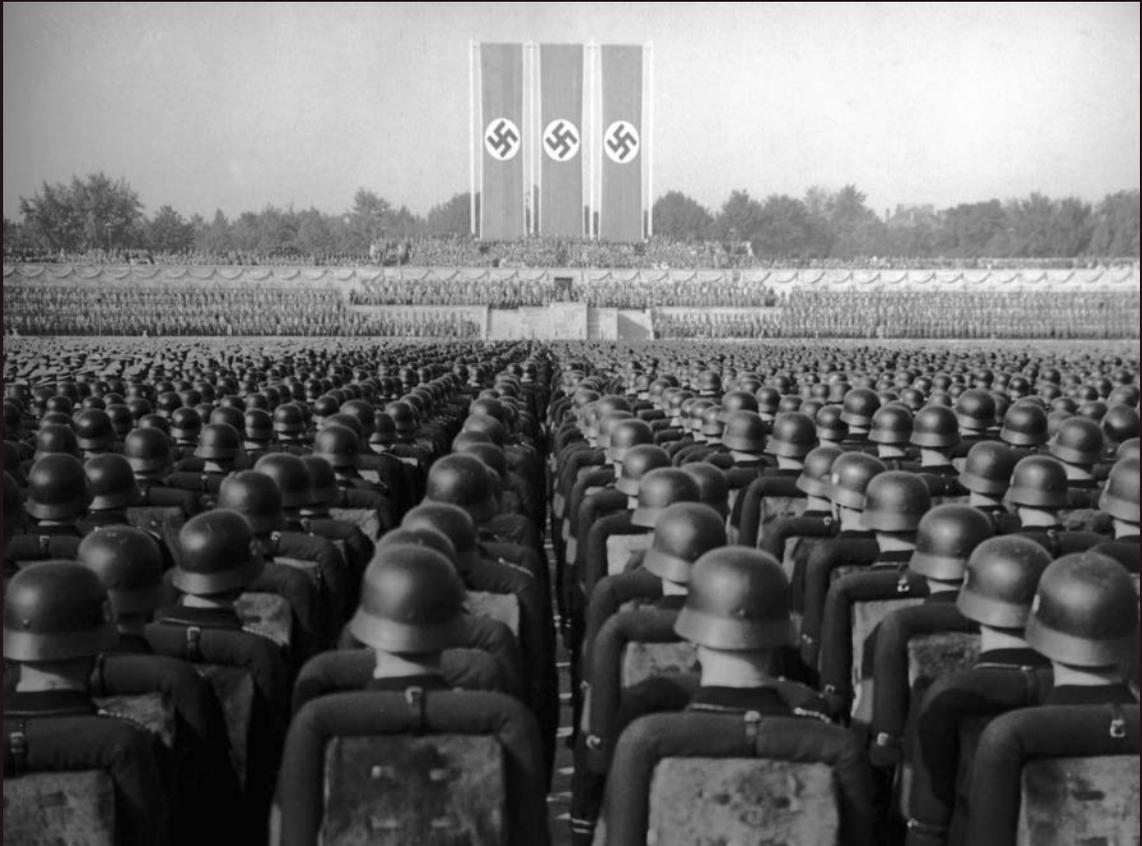
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NELSON MODERN HISTORY



Germany 1918–1945

The *Stahlhelm* (steel helmet) was introduced to the German Army in early 1916 as a protective helmet. Replacing earlier cloth and leather headgear such as the *Pickelhaube*, the *Stahlhelm* has become a potent symbol of German militarism in the first half of the 20th century. During the 1920s the right-wing veteran's organisation, *Der Stahlhelm, Bund der Frontsoldaten*, which became the paramilitary wing of the German National People's Party and was later absorbed into the SA, used the helmet as both its name and symbol. With the establishment of the Third Reich, the *Stahlhelm* continued to be used by the German *Wehrmacht* but it was also used by the *Schutzstaffel*, the SS, as shown here in a photograph taken at the Nuremberg Party rally in 1938.

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)

Hitler was the leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party from 1921 until his death in Berlin in May 1945.

Read more about Adolf Hitler in Chapter 2.



“ Ein Volk, ein Reich, Ein Führer ”

One People, One Empire, One Leader

Adolf Hitler



Australia • Brazil • Japan • Korea • Mexico • Singapore • Spain • United Kingdom • United States

Timeline

1918–1945



1923

January

France and Belgium occupied the Ruhr region of Germany

September

Germany experienced the impact of hyperinflation

November

The Nazis attempted to seize power in Bavaria during the Munich Beer Hall Putsch

1910

1920

November

- The end of the First World War
- Germany signed the armistice

1918



January

- The Spartacist uprising began in Berlin
- Democratic elections for the new German parliament

June

- Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles

1919



Hitler started writing *Mein Kampf*

1924



1929

October

The start of the Great Depression

1934

August

The death of President von Hindenburg

Hitler became Führer (leader) of the German people

1941

June

Germany invaded the Soviet Union and programs of mass killing of European Jews commenced

December

Germany declared war on the United States of America

1930

January

Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany

February

The Reichstag fire

September

The outbreak of the Second World War

1939

May

The end of the Second World War in Europe with the total defeat of Germany and its allies

1933

1945



Germany 1918–1945
1st Edition
KJ Mason

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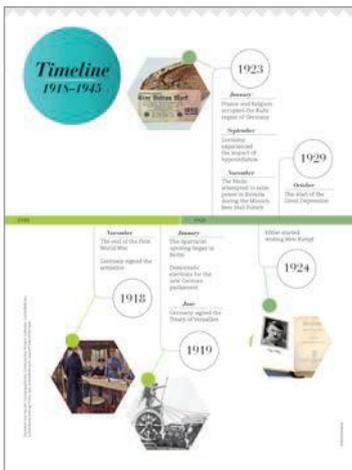
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ABOUT THE SERIES

Using Germany 1918–1945

Germany 1918–1945 has been developed especially for senior secondary students of History and is part of the Nelson Modern History series. Each book in the series is based on the understanding that History is an interpretive study of the past by which you also come to better appreciate the making of the modern world.

Developing understandings of the past and present in senior History extends on the skills you learnt in earlier years. As senior students you will use historical skills, including research, evaluation, synthesis, analysis and communication, and the historical concepts, such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability, to understand and interpret societies from the past. The activities and tasks in *Germany 1918–1945* have been written to ensure that you develop the skills and attributes you need in senior History subjects.



ILLUSTRATED TIMELINE

is a bird's-eye view of the topic and summarises the major developments of the period.

KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS

BRUNNEN NEUBACH (1885–1950)

Leader of the Catholic Centre Party and Archbishop of Cologne from 1933 to 1951. He used astuteness to deal with the impact of the Great Depression and opposed the increasing influence of the Nazi Party in German politics.

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Appeasement
The more given to the policy of the Western democracies of trying to avoid war by conceding to some of Germany's foreign policy demands in the 1930s.

Anti-Semitism
An attitude or action that is anti-Jewish.

Hitler
A term used to describe a race of people who migrated into northern and western Europe in earlier times. In Nazi thinking, the Nordic peoples of Europe were the basis of the so-called Aryan race.

KEY DOCUMENTS

Treaty of Versailles, 1919
The peace treaty that defeated Germany was based on eight June 1919 with the intention to end the provisions of the treaty and the Nazi movement as a consequence of war guilt. Every major political party in Germany sought to end the provisions of the treaty and the Nazi movement as a consequence of war guilt.

Weimar Constitution, 1919–33
Introduced in 1919, it was the

KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS, KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS, KEY DOCUMENTS

feature brief biographies, profiles, definitions and summaries of key documents as a ready reference for learning and revision.

CHAPTER ONE

The Weimar Republic – a new Germany

In November 1918 the First World War came to an end and, after four years of conflict, Germany was finally forced to accept the reality of defeat. It was a shattering experience and one that changed the future of Germany forever.

At the start of this defeat, there were considerable problems. The old order and the systems of government in imperial Germany under the Kaiser were swept aside and a new order was required. The period of German history from 1918 to 1933 is usually called the Weimar Republic, named after the capital, Weimar, where the first freely elected German parliament met in 1919.

From 1918 to 1933 the fragile republic struggled to establish its legitimacy and maintain its authority. In the end, it was a failure. It was a time of tension and hardship. The social conditions gradually worsened and during the great years, from 1929 to the start of the Great Depression in 1930, Germany found a mixture of political stability and economic growth. It was a time when the distance between Germany and its neighbours seemed to narrow and Germany was accepted back into the European community. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, the economic and social conditions of the Weimar Republic were a period of great cultural creativity and social change within Germany.

The final phase of the Weimar Republic, from 1933 to 1945, was a period of authoritarian leadership when the country faced serious economic and political problems that finally brought about the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- What forces of change were at work in Germany, 1918–19?
- Why did the Weimar Republic finally fail in the face of challenges 1919–33?
- Could the failure of German democracy have been avoided?

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- What forces of change were at work in Germany, 1918–19?
- Why did the Weimar Republic finally fail in the face of challenges 1919–33?
- Could the failure of German democracy have been avoided?

INQUIRY QUESTIONS are listed at the start of the chapter. These questions provide a focus for you as you read each chapter.

CHAPTER INTRODUCTIONS

provide a context to the issues that are addressed.

Adolf Hitler – the rise from obscurity

Hitler's early life gave no hint of the extraordinary role he would later play in world history. He was born on 20 April 1889 in the small Austrian town of Braunau where his father, Alois Hitler, was a customs official with the Austrian civil service. His mother, Klara, who was devoted to her son, was a former servant girl.

The young Hitler had ability but performed poorly at school, reacting against discipline and not conforming in school life. Hitler had a poor relationship with his stern and inflexible father, who could not accept his lack of self-discipline and his growing interest in art, architecture and music. When Hitler's father died in 1903, Clara had very little control over her two youngest sons, and in 1905, aged 15, Hitler left school altogether. Two years later Hitler

SOURCE 2.1 The class photo of April 16 in 1896, schoolboy Hitler aged 10 years is top row, fourth from left.



SIGNIFICANT INDIVIDUALS

are biographical profiles and assessments of key historical figures and frequently include questions and activities.

Hitler the public speaker – an eyewitness account from 1929

I looked at this right job man, he Adolf Hitler. I looked at him with my eyes and I felt right and again with my hearing sense. There was a man, when he spoke of the dignity of Germany, I felt ready to spring on my enemy. I began wondering for the first time, listening around I saw that his magnetism was hitting these Reichstag men.

“Oh, several years ago for the first time I saw a man of fifty-two, weary of disgust and disillusionment, a slender looking man, a gentle smile on a shaven face, his gestures a pattern after the fashion without a trace. The crown of the man, the person of his body seemed to flow from his face and I experienced an exhilaration that could be described only as religious conversion.”

Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 1925, pp. 10–11.

QUESTIONS

- How useful was the source for a historian studying Hitler's effect on people?
- Explain what made the author of this extract an supporter of Hitler when he heard him speak.

SOURCE STUDIES

of visual and text primary sources and secondary literature appear frequently through the text and are combined with questions and activities to aid your evaluation and interpretation of evidence from the past.

From The Guardian (London), 13 March 2007

A newly discovered letter by Adolf Hitler's architect and armaments minister Albert Speer proves that he knew about the plans to exterminate the Jews, despite his repeated claims to the contrary.

Writing in 1971 to Hélène Jeanty, the widow of a Belgian resistance leader, Speer admitted that he had been at a conference where Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and Gestapo, had unveiled plans to exterminate the Jews in what is known as the Posen speech. Speer's insistence that he had left before the end of the meeting, and had therefore known nothing about the Holocaust, probably spared him from execution after the Nuremberg trials at the end of the Second World War.

It helped earn him the name of 'the good Nazi' and the image of a genius architect who had miraculously slipped into Nazi circles to further his career. Instead of facing death as many top Nazis did, Speer served 30 years in prison, mainly for using slave labour.

In the letter to Jeanty, written on December 23 1971, Speer wrote: 'There is no doubt I was present as Himmler announced on October 6 1943 that all Jews would be killed'. He continued: 'Who would believe me that I suggested this, that it would have been easier to have written all of this in my memoirs?'

The Guardian, London, 13/3/2007

SONDERWEG (A SPECIAL PATH)

Even before the final destruction of Hitler's Nazis he had begun to explain why it was possible that, with a socialist and cultural vision in Germany, it should have happened both a dark episode in history. Why did Germany suffer under Hitler's brutal regime, and end with Hitler?

In the end you are some historians came to explain Hitler as something almost inevitable or predetermined for Germany. They argued that, unlike other Western European countries, there were historical or Germanic roots that made a revolution like the Nazi movement possible. These historians included the fact that Germany became a unified nation state late than most of the other states in Europe, France and the United States, it never developed a strong democratic tradition and a long experience of 'liberation' or freedom. The ruling elite kept power and influence, and an absolute monarchy was imposed on the Germans in 1918, was established under the unfavourable conditions of defeat and occupation. This led to a reaction in favour of Germany's return to power to the republic. There was also a long and unbroken tradition of Germany being a strong state and that Germany had been considered for some time by a school of thought and philosophy from German writers and philosophers like Hegel and the historian Treitschke who glorified the state over the individual. In effect, these historians suggested that Germany developed 'authoritarianism', following a 'special path' (Sonderweg), and given this, authoritarianism, it was inevitable that Hitler was the end result.

HISTORIAN BOXES

introduce key historians and schools of interpretation as a way of making historiography clearer.

DIAGRAMS AND TALKING SOURCES

are used to visually summarise complex ideas and events.



INFORMATION BOXES

contain extended discussions of key events, concepts and historical developments. Many also include questions and activities.

Chapter summary

- After signing an armistice that ended the First World War in November 1918, Germany became a republic and established a democratic system of government.
- The democracy was challenged by revolutionary actions from political forces of the left and the right.
- The Treaty of Versailles, which Germany was forced to sign in 1919, imposed severe restrictions on the nation and generated a legacy of national bitterness.
- 1933 was a particularly difficult year for Germany with its falling economy, the resignation of the Weimar President by Paul von Hindenburg and the aggressive hyperinflation that destroyed the value of the German currency.
- The German army was always a significant influence in German politics during the Weimar Republic.
- Political reform, mainly the work of Gustav Stresemann, restored the German economy and the nation began to prosper in relative economic and political stability from 1924 to 1929.
- German Stresemann as Foreign Minister from 1923 often achieved success in securing German's standing in the European community.
- The period after 1933 saw the flowering of a fascist culture rooted in the use and abuse of mass media and technology.
- Since a great deal of the German population was based on foreign loans, especially those in the United States, when the Great Depression began in 1929, the German economy suffered badly.
- By 1930 Germany began to feel the full impact of the Depression, as unemployment rose and political violence increased.

Chapter review activities

1. Place these events in chronological order:

- The resignation of the Weimar President
- The Kapp Putsch
- The end of the Great Depression
- Hyperinflation reaches its peak
- Paul von Hindenburg elected President of Germany
- The Beer Hall Putsch

2. Choose a line to connect the terms in Group A to the relevant description in Group B.

Group A	Group B
Germany's economic recovery	Extreme right-wing politics
Stresemann's 'passive revolution'	The German Parliament
Germany's recovery in 1923	German currency in 1923
Reinhold Niebuhr	Payments for war reparations
Reichstag	German politicians announced in 1932
Weimar	Invited to the cabinet of the Weimar Republic
Paul von Hindenburg	Put all their power in the new name of President in 1933
Paul von Hindenburg elected President of Germany	The German army
An industrial area of Germany	Without some extent of right-wing politics
Without some extent of right-wing politics	Extreme left-wing politics
Extreme left-wing politics	A disadvantaged area of Germany



CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CHAPTER REVIEW ACTIVITIES

conclude each chapter. They include a brief précis of the topic, suggestions for further reading, and a range of learning activities that consolidate knowledge and understanding of the chapter's content. These tasks incorporate a range of historical understandings and skills.

CONCLUSION

Germany 1918-1945

ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE

Choose a cartoon, an image or photograph of the 10 most significant events in German history between 1918 and 1945. Your teacher could include political, social, cultural or economic developments during this period.

Draw your cartoon and write with classmates. Discuss similarities and differences between the cartoon or other images and the events you have made your selection.

In light of this discussion, would you change any of your choices? In a brief paragraph explain why.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- The historian Tony Judt has described Germany as the 'divided nation'. In what ways between 1918 and 1945, might Germany be considered to be socially and politically divided?
- In what context saw these committees and commissions in German history between 1918 and 1945?

THE CONCLUSION

summarises the topic and includes a series of activities to consolidate your knowledge of it. More importantly, these final tasks will help you build an understanding and interpretation of this period in history.

Beyond this book

The Nelson Modern History series includes numerous titles on a range of topics covered in senior History courses around Australia. For further information about the series visit: www.nelsonsecondary.com.au.

SERIES EDITOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Studying modern world history is a fascinating and exciting activity for several reasons. The first of these is our closeness to the modern past. All of us who live today are in direct contact with recent and contemporary history. For example, teachers who use this book might have had grandparents who experienced, in different ways, the events of the Second World War. Students who read this book will probably have grandparents who lived through the Swinging Sixties in Australia. Other students who come from more recently arrived migrant families will have stories to tell about significant historical events from their former homeland.

And when it comes to topicality, the study of modern history is also the study of events that directly affect the way we live today. For instance, the work of 18th-century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith is still being used by 21st-century politicians to underpin their economic policies. Further, the activities of feminist and civil rights activists in the 1960s have altered the way the international community and contemporary societies deal with their citizens. And the shadow of two world wars still impinges upon the collective memories of dozens of nations, often leading to confusion between commemoration of the past, celebration of long-ago endeavours and what this book is about, the pursuit of investigative history.

The study of the modern past is exciting too because when it comes to investigating the late 19th, the 20th and the 21st centuries we can use graphic visual and auditory evidence that brings us close to a fuller realisation of how life was lived then and how the people we are researching looked and sounded. While these new sources of evidence can and do bring a freshness to our understanding of the past, they also demand new techniques of historical investigation.

Finally, the study of modern history, which is, to use historian Pieter Geyl's term, 'an argument without end', is often more intense than other forms of history because of our closeness to the events. This means that, even though conclusions may be passionately expressed, a carefully tempered and dispassionate approach to studying controversial events needs to be employed in the formulation of an historical explanation.

Having said all of that, enjoy your study of modern history.

Tony Taylor
Series editor

AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A book usually begins as the work of one person, but comes together in its final form because of the work of many.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance I received from a number of people. My long-time friend Professor Peter Hempenstall was generous with his support for this project. He provided not only access to some valuable resources, but also a path through the vagaries of some of the German Gothic script. The team at Cengage Learning was unfailingly helpful throughout the project, in particular the senior publishing editor Michael Spurr. It was particularly refreshing to work with a person who had his own specific expertise in this subject field and was able to offer invaluable insights and suggestions.

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Finally, I acknowledge the support of my family who have always been nothing but patient and understanding of the enormous time demands these books can make.

K J Mason
May 2014

For David McShane



Johann Kink.

Kink. Verhauungsgeschäft
& Goldwaren

Jos. Leubner.

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Wikimedia US Army Signal Corp



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GERMANY

1918–1945

Until 1871 there was no German nation. In the area of central Europe we now know as Germany, a collection of separate Germanic states had long existed, each with its own ruler and system of government. Of these Germanic states, Prussia, with its capital Berlin, was by far the largest, most powerful and most influential.

Germany became a nation in 1871 after Otto von Bismarck, the Prussian Chancellor (prime minister), used war, clever diplomacy and the might of Prussian military power to unify the various German states. This unified Germany became the strongest economic and military power in Europe.

By the start of the 20th century, Germany's iron and steel industry, fuelled by vast deposits of quality coal, was the largest in Europe. Germany had the strongest army in Europe, an expanding navy and a growing colonial empire. It had a modern transport and communication system and an extensive network of world trade.

The First World War ended this long era of peaceful growth. After four years of enormous struggle and suffering, the war was finally won by Britain, France and the United States of America. Germany, as well as her allies Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, faced the reality of defeat. In the closing days of the war, Germany itself experienced a revolution that swept the old government from power.

The period from 1918 to 1945 was a turbulent time in German history. At the end of the First World War, Germany became a democracy, indeed one of the most democratic nations in the world. But the path of this new democracy was stormy. The years that followed were chaotic and tumultuous, and the dominant theme of German history in the post-war period became the struggle of the new democracy to survive against hostile political and economic forces. Within the span of one generation, Germany experienced the slow collapse of this democracy and the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. By 1933, democracy had failed and the Nazis went on to establish a savage totalitarian system of government that survived until 1945.

In power, the Nazis followed policies of increasing violence and brutality as well as an aggressive foreign policy towards Germany's neighbouring states, policies that would finally provoke the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. It was also a period that saw Nazi Germany oppress and discriminate against German Jews. Later, under the cover of the Second World War, the Nazis implemented a deliberate policy of genocide that was responsible for the systematic murder of more than six million European Jews and minority groups.

For historians, the period of German history from 1918 to 1945 presents huge challenges as we seek to understand and explain the powerful forces at work within Germany during this time. Why did the German experiment with democracy fail? Above all, how was it possible that a cultured, learned and civilised people like the Germans suddenly descended to the depths of barbarity in the first half of the 20th century?

◀ Street scene in Montabaur, Germany, on Christmas morning, 1918 as local people make their way to church. The First World War had ended one month earlier.

KEY FIGURES AND ORGANISATIONS

HEINRICH BRÜNING
(1885–1970)



Leader of the Catholic Centre Party and chancellor of Germany from 1930 to 1932. He tried unsuccessfully to deal with the impact of the Great Depression and oppose the increasing influence of the Nazi Party in German politics.

FRIEDRICH EBERT
(1871–1925)

Leader of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and a supporter of German democracy. He became the first president of the Weimar Republic from 1919 until his death in 1925.

DR JOSEPH GOEBBELS
(1897–1945)



After joining the Nazi Party in 1922 he rose to become one of its most important and influential leaders. Devoted to Hitler, he led the party's propaganda machine and later became Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

HERMANN GÖRING
(1893–1946)



A former war hero of the First World War, he joined the Nazi Party in 1922. He held various important positions in the Third Reich and from 1935 he was commander-in-chief of the *Luftwaffe* (the German air force). In 1940 he was appointed Reich Marshal (*Reichsmarschall*) and was second only to Hitler in the Nazi leadership.

HEINRICH HIMMLER
(1900–1945)



A member of the Nazi Party from the early 1920s, Himmler rose to become *Reichsführer-SS* (Reich Leader of the SS) and Chief of German Police, a position that included supreme command over the Gestapo, the concentration camps and the *Waffen-SS*.

ADOLF HITLER
(1889–1945)

Leader of the Nazi Party. After a long struggle for power he was appointed chancellor of Germany in January 1933, and by 1934 he had established a totalitarian state. With the death of President von Hindenburg in August 1934, he became the *Führer* (Leader) of the German nation, a position he held until his death in April 1945.

FIELD MARSHAL PAUL VON HINDENBURG
(1847–1934)

One of Germany's military leaders during the First World War, he maintained a revered status in German society. He was elected president of the Weimar Republic in 1925. In January 1933 he was persuaded by his advisers to appoint Hitler as chancellor of Germany. On Hindenburg's death in 1934, the path was clear for Hitler to assume absolute power.

ROSA LUXEMBURG
(1871–1919)



Co-founder of the Spartacus League with Karl Liebknecht, during the First World War. She had opposed the Spartacist attempt to seize power in 1919 but was killed with Liebknecht by *Freikorps* troops during the uprising.

GENERAL KURT VON SCHLEICHER (1882–1934)



An army officer and German politician with a reputation for political intrigue. He was chancellor of Germany for two months before Hitler took power in January 1933. He was murdered by the Nazis in the Night of the Long Knives in July 1934.

GUSTAV STRESEMANN
(1878–1929)



The most important of the politicians of the Weimar era. He was chancellor of Germany from August to November 1923. During this time he carried out important economic reforms. He was also foreign minister from 1923 until his death in 1929 and was credited with forging a new relationship between Germany and its neighbours, based on equality and trust.

FRANZ VON PAPEN
(1879–1969)



German politician and chancellor of Germany in 1932. In 1933 he was involved in the political dealings that gave Hitler the chancellorship.

ALBERT SPEER (1905–1981)



One of the leading figures of the Nazi Party, Speer rose to prominence as Hitler's favourite architect in the 1930s and was responsible for a number of major building projects in Germany before the war. In 1942 he was appointed Minister of Armaments and War Production where his organising talent and ability helped to maintain Germany's capacity to carry on the war when defeat became inevitable. Speer served 20 years in prison after the war and later published a number of important books on Nazi Germany.

EINSATZGRUPPEN

Meaning 'task forces': special mobile operational forces of the SS that followed the German army as it invaded Eastern Europe. The task of these killing units was to kill mainly Jews and communists in occupied Poland and Russia.

LENI RIEFENSTAHL
(1902–2003)

After an early career as an actress, she established her reputation as a film director. Although never a member of the Nazi Party, she was close to Hitler and Goebbels, and became an influential figure in the Third Reich. She produced the classic propaganda film of the Nazi state, *Triumph of the Will* (1934).

FREIKORPS

Meaning the 'Free Corps': military units formed in 1918 and made up mainly of right-wing ex-soldiers. They were opposed to the extremists of the left and were used to crush the Spartacist uprising in 1919.

GESTAPO

Abbreviation of *Geheime Staatspolizei* meaning the 'German Secret State Police': set up in 1933 and responsible for investigating political crimes and opposition to the Nazi state. Under the control of Himmler, the SS was one of the most feared organisations in Nazi Germany.

HITLER JUGEND

Meaning 'Hitler Youth': an organisation established by the Nazi Party for boys aged between 14 and 18. Its aim was to provide physical training, to promote discipline and obedience, as well as Nazi ideology in the young. The equivalent organisation for girls was the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Maidens).

KOMMUNISTISCHE PARTEI DEUTSCHLAND (KPD)

Meaning the 'German Communist Party': the party of the extreme left formed out of the earlier Spartacist League. It was opposed both to the democratic system and the republic. The German communists were also the natural political enemy of the Nazis in the struggle for power as the German democracy began to fail.

KRAFT DURCH FREUDE (KDF)

Meaning 'Strength Through Joy': an organisation set up to provide for the leisure time of the German workers.

NATIONALSOZIALISTISCHE DEUTSCHE ARBEITERPARTEI (NSDAP)

Meaning the 'National Socialist German Workers' Party': the extreme right-wing political party led by Adolf Hitler, which held power in Germany from 1933 to 1945. The word 'Nazi' is an abbreviation of *Nationalsozialistische*.

STURMABTEILUNG (SA)

Directly translated from the German as Storm Detachment or Assault Division (and abbreviated to SA), the term refers to the 'Storm-troopers', the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, predominantly made up of ex-*Freikorps* troops. They were also known as the Brownshirts because of their distinctive brown uniforms, and they were an important factor in the rise of the Nazi movement. After Hitler came to power, the SA was brought under control and subordinated to the more sinister *Schutzstaffel*, or SS.

SCHUTZSTAFFEL (THE SS)

Meaning 'guard detachment squadron' and abbreviated to SS: was formed in 1925 as Hitler's personal bodyguards. Under Heinrich Himmler the black-shirted SS grew to become a powerful, elite force in Nazi Germany.

SOZIALDEMOKRATISCHE PARTEI DEUTSCHLANDS (SPD)

Meaning the 'Social Democratic Party': the largest political party in Germany for much of the Weimar period. The SPD was a moderate democratic socialist party that aimed to promote the welfare of the German working class. It opposed both the German communists on the extreme left, and the Nazis on the extreme right.

SPARTACIST LEAGUE

The name of the extreme left-wing group that sought to overthrow the German Government and establish a Soviet or communist regime in January 1919.

TOTENKOPFVERBÄNDE

Meaning 'the Death's Head Units': as part of the SS, their main task was to administer and control the concentration camp system across the Reich.

WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The name given to the period of German history from 1919 to 1933 when Germany had a democratic system of government. It was named after the town of Weimar where the first parliament of the new German state met in 1919.

Anti-Semitism

An attitude or action that is anti-Jewish.

Appeasement

The name given to the policy of the Western democracies of trying to avoid war by conceding to some of Germany's foreign policy demands in the 1930s.

Aryan

A term used to describe a race of people who migrated into northern and western Europe in earlier times. In Nazi thinking, the Nordic peoples of Europe were the basis of the so-called Aryan race.

Blitzkrieg

Meaning 'lightning war': military tactics developed by the German army that emphasised mobility and the concentrated use of armour and air power to defeat the enemy. The tactic of blitzkrieg was used with great success in 1939–40 during the attacks on Poland and on the Western Front.

Civil service

The various government departments and agencies that administer the day-to-day functioning of the state. 'Bureaucracy' is another term sometimes used for the civil service.

Concentration camp

A place of detention for political opponents and others who opposed the Nazi regime. The first camps were run by the SA and opened within days of Hitler's appointment as chancellor in 1933.

Dolchstoßlegende

Meaning the 'stab in the back legend': the belief that spread in Germany after the First World War that the German army had not been defeated; rather it had been betrayed by various groups in German society.

Expressionist movement

A movement in the arts from the 19th century in which the artist sought to convey the expression of inner experiences and emotions rather than depicting objective reality.

Final Solution

The term used by the Nazis for the extermination of the Jewish people.

Führer

Meaning 'leader': in Nazi Germany Hitler was called the 'Führer'.

Gau/Gauleiter

The Nazi Party divided Germany into administrative units for efficiency and planning. Each of these units was called a *Gau*. There were 42 *Gaue* (plural) and each was administered by an official of the Nazi Party called a *Gauleiter*.

Gleichschaltung

Meaning 'coordination': used by the Nazis after 1933 to describe the process by which various aspects of German life (e.g. the civil service, trade unions) were brought under the control of the party. The term is sometimes used to describe the process of Nazification of Germany after 1933.

Hyperinflation

Extreme or rapid inflation that destroys the value of the currency. Hyperinflation, which devastated the German economy in the early 1920s, came to a head in November 1923.

Junkers

The landowning aristocratic class of Prussia. They were a powerful conservative influence in German politics in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Paul von Hindenburg was from a *Junker* family.

Kristallnacht

Meaning 'Crystal Night' and often called 'The Night of Broken Glass': the organised Nazi attack on Jewish property across Germany on 9–10 November 1938.

Lebensraum

Meaning 'living space': the concept that was a major part of Hitler's foreign policy thinking. Germany's living space, or *Lebensraum*, was to be carved out in Eastern Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union.

Liberalism

The belief in the liberty or freedom of the individual from excessive government control. Liberals believed that democracy and parliamentary government were the best ways to preserve individual liberties.

Nationalism

The desire to be a nation and the belief that a people with a common language and culture have the right to be a nation. An aspect of nationalism that developed in Germany, which included the promotion and assertion of the superiority of the interests of the German nation above all others.

Night of the Long Knives

The name given to the elimination of the leadership of the SA on 30 June 1934.

Passive resistance

The policy of non-violent action adopted by the German Government in response to the French and Belgian occupation of the Ruhr in 1923.

Presidential rule

A situation in which the president of Germany ruled by the use of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution. As parliamentary government collapsed from 1930, chancellors Brüning and Papen relied on the president to enact their legislation through decree. This process ignored the will of the elected parliament and was a step towards the failure of parliamentary democracy in Germany.

Proportional Representation

The method of voting used in elections in the democratic Weimar Republic to 1933. With this system, people vote for the party not the individual and a quota of votes determines how many members of that party are elected. It often allows for even small political groups to get some representation in the parliament or *Reichstag*.

Reichstag

The name of the lower house of the German parliament.

Rentenmark

The new currency issued in 1923 to remedy the problem of the hyperinflation. It was replaced by the new German mark in 1924.

Synagogue

A place of worship for the Jewish faith.

Third Reich

The period of German history from 1933 to 1945. The First Reich was the period of the Holy Roman Empire from 962 to 1806; the Second Reich was the period from 1871 to 1918.

Totalitarianism

A system of government in which power and all aspects of state affairs is in the hands of one party, and that party tolerates no opposition.

Volk

Meaning 'folk' or 'people': in German it has a stronger meaning and is used to describe the unifying characteristics of the German people.

Völkisch movement

A nationalist movement from the late 19th century that was driven by many German writers, philosophers and artists who aggressively promoted the idea of a pure German culture and Germanic race. Anti-Semitism was a part of the *Völkisch* movement and many of its ideas about race superiority and hatred of the Jews were picked up in the philosophy of the Nazi movement.

Völkischer Beobachter

Meaning 'People's Observer': the newspaper of the Nazi Party.

Volksgemeinschaft

Meaning 'the people's (or national) community': the Nazis preached an idealised version of a new German society, a *Volk* or folk community to which all racially pure Germans belonged.

Volkssturm

Literally meaning People's Assault; *Volkssturm* refers to 'the People's Militia' established for the defence of Germany in 1944. The *Volkssturm* was a Nazi Party organisation and was made up of men aged from 16 to 60.

Welfare state

A state in which the government accepts its responsibility to provide for the less fortunate. This usually includes welfare measures such as public health services and public housing, pensions, and unemployment and other benefits to those in most need.

Decree of the Reich President for the Protection of People and State, 28 February 1933

A decree issued by the government under the provision of Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which cancelled the sections of the constitution that guaranteed the basic rights and freedoms of the German people.

Enabling Act, March 1933

A law passed by a two-thirds vote of the *Reichstag*. This law altered the Weimar Constitution and allowed Hitler and his government to rule independently of both the *Reichstag* and the president. It effectively allowed the government to make laws simply by announcing them.

Law Concerning the Formation of new Political Parties July 1933

The Enabling Act (March 1933) gave the government the power to make laws without reference to the Reichstag. In July 1933, in a short, two clause document, the government abolished all political parties in Germany except the Nazi Party.

Mein Kampf

Adolf Hitler's memoir-cum-political manifesto, which was written in 1924. It is a detailed documentation of much of Hitler's thinking about the political process, nationalism, the impact of the Treaty of Versailles and racism. Rather than being viewed as a blueprint of his future plans, it is best considered an expression of his *Weltanschauung* (world view).

Nuremberg Laws, September 1935

Included *The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour* and *The Reich Citizenship Law* (15 September 1938). These were laws issued against the German Jews. From September 1935, Jews were forbidden to marry Germans, and Jews were deprived of their German citizenship.

Treaty of Versailles, 1919

The peace treaty that defeated Germany was forced to sign in June 1919 with the victorious powers after the First World War. It imposed severe terms on the German nation including reparations and an acceptance of war guilt. Every major political party in Germany sought to undo the provisions of the treaty and the Nazi movement in particular was able to gain significant political advantage by its constant opposition to the Treaty of Versailles.

Weimar Constitution, 1919–33

Introduced in 1919, it was the document upon which the government of Germany functioned until 1933. It established Germany as a democratic republic and contained provisions that guaranteed the basic rights of the German people. There were, however, flaws in the constitution, which added to the political instability in the early 1930s. The Nazis came to power legally under the provisions of this constitution and in 1933 changed the constitution to establish a totalitarian state.



alg-images/Horst Naumann

CHAPTER ONE

The Weimar Republic – a new Germany

In November 1918 the First World War came to an end and, after four years of conflict, Germany was finally forced to accept the reality of defeat. It was a shattering experience and one that shaped the future of German history.

Amid the shock of this defeat, there were revolutionary outbreaks. The old order and the system of government in Imperial Germany under the Kaiser (the German Emperor) was swept aside and Germany became a republic. The period of German history from 1919 to 1933 is usually called the Weimar Republic, named after the quiet German town where the first freely elected German parliament met in 1919.

From 1919 to 1923 this fragile republic struggled to establish its legitimacy and overcome threats to its authority from within Germany. It was a time of violence and instability. The early hardships gradually settled and during the good years, from 1924 to the start of the Great Depression in 1929, Germany found a measure of political stability and economic growth. It was a time when the distrust between Germany and its neighbours eased and Germany was accepted back into the European community. In the free and tolerant society of the time it was also a period of great cultural creativity and social change within Germany.

The final phase of the Weimar Republic, from 1929 to 1933, were years of renewed hardship when the country faced serious economic and political problems that finally brought about the collapse of German democracy and the victory of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis.

◀ *Weimer Carnival* by Horst Naumann, 1928. Oil on canvas 91 cm × 71 cm

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What forces of change were at work in Germany during 1918–19?
- + Why did the Weimar Republic finally fail in the face of challenges during 1919–33?
- + Could the failure of German democracy have been avoided?

The final years of the war

By August 1917, as the First World War entered its fourth year, troops from France and the British Empire faced the German army along the Western Front, a complex series of trenches and fortifications stretching over 700 kilometres, from Switzerland to the North Sea.

FORTUNES OF WAR

While the Germans could not break through against the British and French in the west, they had won victories in the east. Russia had entered the war on the side of Britain and France, but their large, ill-equipped army had suffered a series of military defeats at the hands of the Germans. By March 1917, as strikes and food riots gripped the major cities, Tsar Nicholas II was forced to abdicate and hand over power to a provisional government. In November the **Bolsheviks**, led by Lenin, overthrew this government and established the world's first communist state. One of the first acts of the new regime was to take Russia out of the war.

Bolsheviks

The name of the largest group within the Russian Social Democratic Party. They were led by Lenin and came to power in Russia in November 1917. The terms 'Bolshevik' and 'Bolshevism' are often used to mean 'communist'.

neutral

not aligned with either side in a dispute or war

The collapse of Russia in 1917 was balanced in a sense by the entry of the United States of America into the war. When the war began in 1914, President Wilson had declared the United States to be a **neutral** nation and from the start of the war in 1914 to April 1917, the United States had stayed out of the war. However, in January 1917 Germany announced its decision to begin a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. In an attempt to break Britain, all ships, regardless of their nationality, including those of neutral powers, could be sunk if they sought to approach the ports of Britain or France.

The declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare forced the United States to enter the war. By March 1917, seven United States merchant vessels had been sunk, and in April 1917 the United States ended its long tradition of isolationism and declared war on Germany. The overthrow of the autocratic (non-democratic) Tsarist regime made it easier for the democratic United States

to enter the war. In President Wilson's thinking the war now had a purpose – to defeat Germany and to establish a new world order in which democratic ideals would triumph.

1918 – the last offensive

During the winter of 1917–18 the German High Command, led by Field Marshal von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff, realised that Germany's only hope of victory lay in a decisive breakthrough on the Western Front against the British and French, before the United States had time to become fully involved in the fighting.



Alamy/Pictorial Press Ltd

SOURCE 1.1 (from left to right) Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, Kaiser Wilhelm II and General Erich Ludendorff in 1917. Hindenburg and Ludendorff were Germany's supreme military commanders and ultimately made the decision in late 1918 that the war could not be won.

This German offensive aimed at achieving the long-awaited breakthrough began at dawn on 21 March 1918. In the early weeks of the offensive, German military confidence was revived as the Allied lines were forced back. However, it came at a heavy price. The best of the troops had been used in the initial attacks and by mid-1918 the German reinforcements were increasingly the young and the old. Moreover, 100 000 fresh, well-equipped American troops were entering the conflict and the Allied armies, superior in both manpower and weaponry, regained the initiative. The confident hope of a German victory had gone.

Within a few weeks, all the territorial gains of the 1918 offensive were lost and the German army was now falling back towards the very borders of Germany itself. In September Allied troops finally broke through the German line, while in the east, Germany's allies, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Turkey, faced collapse. On 29 September 1918, Ludendorff and Hindenburg told Kaiser Wilhelm II that the war was lost and that Germany must negotiate an **armistice** with the advancing Allied forces. The news that the German Government was now seeking to negotiate an armistice was the underlying cause of the revolutionary activity that followed.

armistice

A suspension of fighting during a war by agreement between the opposing sides. The armistice that ended the fighting in the First World War came into effect on 11 November 1918.



FROM ARMISTICE TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1918	NOVEMBER	The end of the First World War; Germany signed the armistice
1919	JANUARY	The Spartacist uprising
	JUNE	Germany signed the Treaty of Versailles
1920	MARCH	The Kapp <i>Putsch</i>
1921	AUGUST	Germany made its first reparation payment
1922	JUNE	German foreign minister Walther Rathenau was assassinated
1923	JANUARY	French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr
		Germany declared a policy of passive resistance
	JULY	The exchange rate for the US dollar equalled 150 000 marks
	AUGUST	Gustav Stresemann became Chancellor
	NOVEMBER	A new currency, the <i>Rentenmark</i> , was introduced
		The Stresemann Government fell
1924	APRIL	The Dawes Plan, which revised Germany's reparations payment, was announced
1926	SEPTEMBER	Germany joined the League of Nations
1929	JUNE	The Young Plan, which reduced German reparations, was introduced
	OCTOBER	Gustav Stresemann died
		The Great Depression began

The November Revolution, 1918

The outstanding feature of the so-called November Revolution, which swept away the existing political system in Germany, was its suddenness. During the war there had been increasing pressure for change, but so long as the military held their dominant position and the possibility of victory remained, the prospects of any major reform seemed remote. Suddenly, in September 1918, the military effort had collapsed and Germany faced the prospect of military defeat as well as political and social unrest.

THE KIEL MUTINY

The event that triggered the November Revolution in late 1918 was a mutiny in the German navy. In November 1918, in the closing days of the war, the Supreme Naval Command, determined to restore the honour of the service and without any authority from the new government in Berlin, decided to launch an attack on the vastly superior British fleet. The sailors in the port of Wilhelmshaven simply refused to get up steam or raise the anchors. The mutiny of the sailors spread to the city of Kiel, where the workers joined in their protest.

WORKERS' AND SOLDIERS' COUNCILS

The first Workers' and Soldiers' Council was set up in Kiel. These were political associations made up of workers and returning soldiers. Within days, the example of the revolutionary action in Kiel had spread to other cities in northern Germany, and by the first week of November, Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were functioning in Berlin, Lübeck, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig, Bremen and other northern German cities.

soviet

A Russian word meaning 'council'. During the Russian Revolution, the Soviets were councils of workers and soldiers.

The Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, which were modelled on the **soviets** that had sprung up during the Russian Revolution, supported the idea of socialism. The sudden appearance of these political groups was the result of sheer frustration, war weariness and disillusionment on the part of returning soldiers and workers. The councils took control of the local city governments and began to demand social and political change, including freedom of speech, the release of political prisoners, the removal of the Kaiser and the immediate end of the war.

The unrest in northern Germany quickly spread to other parts of the country. A Workers' and Soldiers' Council was set up in the southern state of Bavaria, and on 8 November Bavaria went further and declared itself to be an independent republic. This was a revolutionary act, as a new government led by the radical socialist Kurt Eisner took power and the Bavarian monarchy was abolished. Civil unrest and the breakdown of order were spreading across Germany as a sense of defeat and disillusionment grew.

GERMANY BECOMES A REPUBLIC

The wave of unrest in northern Germany and the fall of the monarchy in Bavaria increased the pressure for the removal of the Kaiser. The Allied powers, in particular President Wilson of the United States, were not prepared to negotiate with Germany until the old government had been removed. The military leadership also believed that the Kaiser had to go for the sake of Germany.

The supreme military commanders, Field Marshal von Hindenburg and General Ludendorff, now demanded that a government be established that had the support of the *Reichstag*, the lower house of the German Parliament. Power was handed to the politicians to secure peace and above all to preserve the honour of the German army. The new democratic civilian government, and not the army, would carry the shame for the defeat.

On 9 November, the Kaiser's abdication was announced and the **Chancellor**, Prince Max of Baden, handed the government of Germany to Friedrich Ebert the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the largest political party in the *Reichstag*. Shortly after Ebert accepted the office of Chancellor, his deputy, Philipp Scheidemann, addressed an excited crowd from the balcony of the *Reichstag* building in Berlin. He ended his speech with an emotional cry: 'The old and the rotten – the monarchy – has broken down. Long live the new! Long live the German Republic!' Chancellor Ebert had wanted an elected assembly to finally decide whether Germany would become a republic. It was too late. At the end of a momentous day the Kaiser was gone, the Social Democratic Party had been handed power, and Imperial Germany had become the Republic of Germany.



Corbis/dpa/BfAb

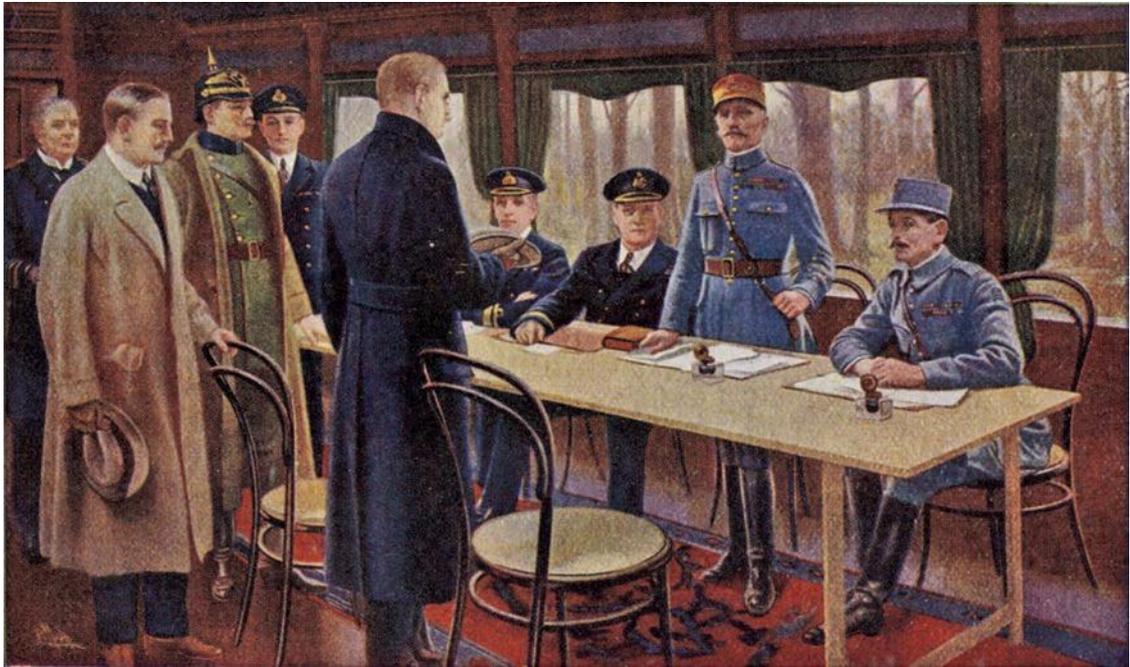
SOURCE 1.2 Friedrich Ebert (1871–1925), German Chancellor during the revolutionary upheavals of 1918–19 and first president of the Weimar Republic. He was president from 1919 until his death in 1925.

Chancellor

Prime Minister who is the head of the government

THE ARMISTICE, 11 NOVEMBER 1918

On 6 November President Wilson of the United States had informed the German Government that the Allies were prepared to grant an armistice and Matthias Erzberger, with other members of the German armistice commission, left Berlin to sign the surrender. The Germans crossed no-man's-land between the opposing armies in a car with a bugler on the running board heralding their progress. Finally they arrived at the private railway car of Marshal Foch, the Allied commander-in-chief, in the forest of Compiègne near Paris. 'What are these persons doing here?' Foch is supposed to have said as the German representatives entered. He then handed Erzberger the terms of the armistice, with the demand that it be accepted within 72 hours. Attempts by the Germans to modify the terms of the armistice were rejected by the Allies, and so at 5 a.m. on 11 November the German representatives signed the armistice. The First World War officially ended six hours later at 11 a.m.



Alamy/Photo12/Eik-Opid

SOURCE 1.3 The German delegation led by Matthias Erzberger arrives to sign an armistice with the Allied commander-in-chief Marshal Foch in his railway carriage in the Forest of Compiègne near Paris on 11 November 1918. The war officially ended a few hours later.



Alamy/alg-images

SOURCE 1.4 A political poster of the German National Peoples' Party from 1924

The 'stab in the back legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*)

The shock of defeat in November 1918 affected all classes in Germany and an explanation of this defeat was soon found. The belief grew that Germany had not been defeated; it had been betrayed. This became the so-called 'stab in the back legend' or *Dolchstoßlegende*. The German army, it was claimed, had not failed; rather, it had been betrayed by the revolutionary activity at home, and the scapegoats for the defeat were easily found – socialists, pacifists, war profiteers and Jews. It was a belief

deliberately encouraged and accepted by the right-wing conservative forces in Germany and by the army command itself.

The German army was not prepared to be involved with the negotiations for a shameful peace and the 'stab in the back legend' shifted the shame of defeat from the army and placed it elsewhere. Although it was the German High Command that had urged an armistice, they were never left with the blame. The civilian politicians, the so-called 'November criminals', were held responsible.

continued

continued

Questions

- 1 Explain what message is being conveyed in this political poster of 1924.
- 2 Which political group or groups is the person with the knife intended to represent? How is this message conveyed to a person seeing this poster?
- 3 Which groups in German society would have been the most accepting of this type of image and the message it conveys?

Creating a German democracy

In 1919 a democratic system came to Germany suddenly and unexpectedly. The system faced great challenges and 12 years later this democracy collapsed and a brutal totalitarian state took its place. It was never inevitable that this bold democratic experiment in Germany would fail, but because of that failure the course of world history was dramatically changed.

THE 1919 ELECTIONS

The most urgent and immediate task facing the German Government in 1919 was to hold free democratic elections for a new parliament. Despite the political violence and unrest in Berlin and elsewhere, elections for a new German parliament were held on 19 January 1919 and all Germans over the age of 20 had the right to vote. This included the right of all women to vote, making Germany one of only a few nations at the time to support female **suffrage**.

suffrage

The right to vote in elections

The election results were a clear vote of support for the concepts of both a democracy and a republic. Of the 423 seats in the new *Reichstag*, the parties of moderation were the winners, with Ebert's Social Democratic Party (SPD) securing 165 seats, the Centre Party 91 seats, and the German Democratic Party (DDP) 75 seats. These three parties were supportive of the republic and the democracy.



akg-images/ulstein bild - bpk/Willy Romer

SOURCE 1.5 Supporters of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) pasting over posters of the opposition parties in Berlin during the elections of January 1919

THE GERMAN CONSTITUTION

Democratic institutions had already developed in Germany before the First World War. Many of the German states had democratic governments, Germany had independent political parties and there were free elections for the *Reichstag*. However, in 1919, amid the collapse and defeat in

Extracts from the Weimar Constitution

Article 1: The German Reich is a republic. Political authority emanates from the people.

Article 114: Personal liberty is inviolable. Curtailment or deprivation of personal liberty by a public authority is permissible only by authority of law.

Article 115: The home of every German is his sanctuary and is inviolable.

Article 117: The secrecy of letters and all postal, telegraph, and telephone communications is inviolable. Exceptions are inadmissible except by national law.

Article 118: Every German has the right, within the limits of the general laws, to express his opinion freely by word, in writing, print, in picture form, or in any other way ... Censorship is forbidden ...

Article 123: All Germans have the right to assemble peacefully and unarmed without giving notice and without special permission ...

Article 124: All Germans have the right to form associations and societies for in print, in picture form, or in any other way ... Censorship is forbidden ...

Article 153: The right of private property is guaranteed by the constitution ...



akg-images/ullstein bild - Leber

SOURCE 1.6 The *Reichstag* building in Berlin, home of the German Parliament

Article 48: If any state does not fulfil the duties imposed upon it by the constitution or the laws of the Reich, the President of the Reich may enforce such duties with the aid of the armed forces. In the event that public order and security are seriously disturbed or threatened, the President of the Reich may take the measures necessary for their restoration, intervening, if necessary, with the aid of the armed forces. For this purpose, he may temporarily suspend, wholly or in part, the basic rights laid down in Articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153.

STRUCTURE OF THE WEIMAR GOVERNMENT

THE PRESIDENT

- + elected by the German people every seven years
- + head of state
- + commander-in-chief of the armed forces
- + appoints and can dismiss the Chancellor
- + has emergency powers under Article 48 of the German Constitution

THE CHANCELLOR AND THE CABINET

- + responsible for the day-to-day government of the country
- + initiates laws, which must be approved by the *Reichstag*

THE REICHSTAG

- + members from the various political parties are elected by the people using a system of proportional representation
- + laws are passed in the *Reichstag*

THE REICHSRAT

- + The upper house of the German Parliament, which represents the 16 German states

war, a new constitution made Germany one of the most democratic states in the world. A series of clauses in the new constitution guaranteed the basic rights of the German people. All Germans were held to be equal before the law, and personal liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of religion were all written into the constitution. Private property was guaranteed and Germans had the right to form trade unions. One of the first major tasks of the new parliament in July 1919 was to approve the new German Constitution.

Weaknesses in the constitution

The sudden arrival of a democratic Germany was no guarantee that democracy would work and the constitution was one of the major causes for the political instability that was a feature of Weimar Germany. In its quest to assure its citizens true freedom, the constitution gave the opponents of democracy almost unlimited rights to express their opposition to the system. These opponents came from both the extreme left, with the German communists, and later from the extreme right, with the Nazis. There were also other powerful traditional right-wing forces in Germany, such as the military, powerful industrialists, the civil service, the judiciary and the conservative land-owning classes that had, from the start, opposed the republic and its democratic foundations. These pillars of the old authoritarian society had wielded most of the power of pre-war Germany and they retained their influence throughout the Weimar era. In effect, Germany had created a democracy, but those who opposed democracy held the power and influence; it was a republic, but with very few republicans. The traditionalists and many others blamed all the problems of Weimar Germany on the democratic system. Loyalty to the Fatherland required disloyalty to the republic.

ROLE OF THE PRESIDENT

Under the new constitution, Germany was to have a president who would be elected by all Germans every seven years. The president was not a figurehead and had very real powers as head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces, with the power to appoint and dismiss the Chancellor and the right to dissolve the *Reichstag* and call new elections. Article 48 of the constitution gave the president emergency powers. These powers included the right to intervene with the use of the armed forces to restore order if stability was threatened, and the power to suspend the basic liberties and rights of the German people. In this genuine attempt at democracy, the constitution still gave one person the authority to overrule the system. Ironically, in the last years of the republic, this use of presidential power became a major factor in the ultimate collapse of the system.

THE VOTING SYSTEM

The new constitution provided for the election of members of the *Reichstag* by a system of proportional representation. Under this system, votes were cast not for the individual, but for the party; and using a quota system, every 60 000 votes for that party usually guaranteed one member in the *Reichstag*. Proportional representation was seen as the most democratic system, but it also allowed small parties (some no more than interest groups) to gain seats in the *Reichstag*. In this way the voting system added to the instability of the political system for no party ever had a commanding majority. At a time when the new republic desperately needed political stability, Weimar Germany was a multiparty state to the point that every one of the 21 Weimar governments in the 14 years from 1919 to 1933 was a **coalition** government.

coalition

Two or more political parties working together to form a government. Coalition governments were a feature of the Weimar Republic.

Diktat

A German word meaning 'dictated' or 'imposed'. The term was used in the context of the Treaty of Versailles, which the Germans saw as dictated to or forced on Germany.

Peace and its consequences

The first major political act of the new republic was also its most unpopular – in June 1919 Germany reluctantly signed the Treaty of Versailles. The German Government had been given no say in the drafting of the peace. This was a peace imposed by the victors, a **Diktat**, shaped in large measure by the French determination to ensure that Germany would never again threaten France.

Terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Military provisions

- + The German army was to be reduced to 100 000 men. Germany was forbidden to develop an air force.
- + The German navy was to be reduced to a few ships for coastal patrols, and submarines were strictly forbidden.

Territorial provisions

- + Alsace and Lorraine, the territories taken by Germany from France in 1871, were to be returned to France.
- + The rich German coal-producing borderland area of the Saar Basin was to be placed under international control for 15 years.

continued

continued

- + The Prussian province of Posen was given to the new nation of Poland, and to give the new Polish state access to the sea, part of west Prussia was also incorporated into the Polish state, cutting East Prussia off from the rest of Germany. This region, the so-called 'Polish Corridor', contained not only Poles but also Germans who now found themselves living in Poland.
- + The major German city of Danzig on the Baltic Sea was also detached from Germany and made a free city under the control of the League of Nations.
- + Part of northern Schleswig was given to Denmark.
- + The region of Eupen and Malmedy in the west was given to Belgium.
- + To protect France from future German aggression, the Rhineland (an area of Germany between the Rhine River and the French border) was to be permanently demilitarised. It remained in Germany, but Germany was forbidden to have any military forces in the Rhineland.
- + Any future union (or *Anschluss*) with the neighbouring state of Austria was strictly forbidden.

Colonial provisions

- + Germany was deemed 'colonially unworthy' and lost all of her colonies. They were to be administered as mandate territories by the League of Nations.

Reparations

- + Germany was to pay the cost of the war, and the final **reparations** figure of 132 000 million marks (US\$32 billion) was not arrived at until 1921.

War guilt

- + Clause 231 of the treaty, known as the 'war guilt clause', required that Germany accept responsibility for causing the war.

reparations

Money paid by a nation defeated in war; usually paid to compensate the victors for their damage and loss in the war



SOURCE 1.7 Germany and the Treaty of Versailles. The new nation states of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Austria, Hungary and those of the Baltic States were also established as a result of The First World War.

GERMAN REACTION TO THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

Despite the anger and emotional outbursts that greeted the news of the treaty in Germany, in reality, the German Government had very little choice other than to accept it. The Allied powers were prepared to resume the war if Germany did not sign. Furthermore, the Allied powers maintained a brutal blockade of Germany that caused severe food shortages and ultimately accounted for the deaths of 70 000 Germans before it was finally lifted in June 1919.

There were many in Germany, including Chancellor Scheidemann and Field Marshal von Hindenburg, who urged outright rejection of the treaty. The other military leader, Ludendorff's successor General Groener, took a more realistic view and urged the government to accept the treaty. If Germany resisted, he wrote, 'the result would be the downfall of Germany, the Allies would show themselves pitiless ... the name of Germany would disappear from the map.'¹

GERMANY SIGNS THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

On 22 June 1919 Chancellor Scheidemann resigned rather than sign the treaty, and a new government of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Centre Party was formed under Gustav Bauer. Two days later, the *Reichstag* reluctantly voted to accept the treaty and, on 28 June 1919, in a ceremony in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, two German delegates, Dr Müller and Dr Bell, signed the Treaty of Versailles. In the very room where Bismarck had declared the German Empire in 1871, the Germans were forced to accept the humiliation of defeat.

Editorial from a German newspaper, 28 June 1919

Vengeance German Nation! Today in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles the disgraceful treaty is being signed. Do not forget it. In the place where in the glorious year of 1871 the German Empire in all its glory had its origin, German honour is being carried into its grave. Do not forget it! The German people will with unceasing labour press forward to reconquer the place among nations to which it is entitled. Then will come vengeance for the shame of 1919.

Editorial from *Deutsche Zeitung*, 28 June 1919

Questions

- 1 Explain why the Allies persisted with their determination to punish Germany after 1918, despite the fact that Germany was now a democracy.
- 2 List five main features of the Treaty of Versailles that could justify the claim that 'German honour is being carried to its grave'.
- 3 Explain the reference to 'the glorious year of 1871'.
- 4 What is this newspaper editorial suggesting might happen in the future?

THE LEGACY OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

The most important effect of the Treaty of Versailles in Germany was not the immediate hardship it generated, but rather the long-term legacy of bitterness and humiliation. The Germans felt, yet

again, that they had been betrayed and treated unfairly. It was a feeling that cut across all classes in the country. Someone had to take the blame and so, for many Germans, the republic and the democracy were held responsible.

Nationalists and the political forces of the extreme left and the extreme right used the emotionalism of the treaty in propaganda to persistently and effectively attack the republic and the democracy. With clever political instincts, politicians like Hitler and other opponents of German democracy took full advantage of the memory of the treaty to remind Germans of the shame and betrayal they had endured.

After the Treaty of Versailles, a psychological disillusionment took hold that affected most classes. Although the treaty had been an insult to German honour, it did not, in the long-term, hold back Germany's economic and military recovery. But it did damage Germany's fragile democracy, for the Weimar Republic was forever associated with the humiliating Treaty of Versailles. Finally, there were the economic effects of the treaty. Clause 232 of the treaty required Germany to 'make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population by the Allied and Associated Powers'. At the same time, the economic provisions of the treaty effectively weakened Germany's capacity to pay. The immediate effect of the treaty was that Germany experienced serious economic and political instability, and until stability could be restored (as it was only after 1924), Germany had no real hope of meeting its reparations burdens.

Another long-term effect of the Treaty of Versailles was that it failed to solve the German problem. The Allies could either try to cultivate Germany as a potential partner by giving the



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 1.8 Disarmament was a major feature of the Treaty of Versailles. This man is destroying German military helmets with a pickaxe shortly after the treaty was signed in June 1919.

Germans as little cause for resentment as possible, or they could simply eliminate Germany's capacity to reassert itself as a future rival. The Treaty of Versailles failed on both counts. It imposed on the Germans a settlement that they would certainly seek to overturn and it left virtually intact their capacity to do so by force in the near future.

One observer at the Paris Peace Conference was the young British economist John Maynard Keynes. In his well-known book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, published in 1920, Keynes warned of the lack of economic realism in the treaty and the effect it would have on Germany. Keynes was proved right. By 1923, the German economy had collapsed and Germany was unable to meet its reparations bill.

Political challenges for the Weimar Republic

In politics the terms 'right-wing' and 'left-wing' are usually used to describe political parties and the political views of individuals. The use of the terms began during the French Revolution when political groups who wanted more extreme or radical change sat on the left of the semi-circular political assembly, while more moderate or conservative groups sat on the right. To be defined as a party of the right suggests more conservative, traditional or cautious politics, while parties of the left tend to be more radical. Parties of the far left or far right, at each end of the scale, were seen as radical and extreme. In 1919 the most extreme political group in the new Weimar Republic was the Spartacist League (*Spartakusbund*) led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

AN ATTACK FROM THE LEFT – THE SPARTACISTS

Taking their name from the famous Thracian gladiator Spartacus, who had defied the authority of Rome in 73 BCE, the Spartacists were true revolutionaries, loyal to the ideas of Karl Marx and committed to the concept of world revolution. With the example of Russian communism (Bolshevism) to inspire them, they wanted a revolution in Germany like the communist revolution in Russia the year before.

Conditions in Germany in January 1919 encouraged such a movement. In 1919 the nation faced a bitter winter, made worse by the severe food shortages as the Allied blockade continued, and many soldiers who returned home found only hardship and unemployment. In Berlin alone the unemployed numbered some 250 000. Unemployed workers were a ready audience for the radical political messages from the extreme left.

In January 1919 violence broke out in Berlin as a number of key buildings were seized by the Spartacists, and a revolutionary committee declared the Ebert Government deposed. A mass demonstration of 200 000 workers took place in Berlin and a general strike was declared.

Gustav Noske and the *Freikorps*

Putsch

German word for 'an attempt to overthrow the government by force'

Ebert had anticipated the possibility of an armed **Putsch**, by the extreme left and in December 1918 he appointed a fellow socialist, Gustav Noske, as Defence Minister. 'Someone must be the bloodhound,' Noske is reputed to have said. 'I won't shirk the responsibility.'²

Although the army had secretly pledged to support the government, Noske saw the *Freikorps* units as a more reliable instrument to counter any threat from the extreme left. The *Freikorps* were right-wing groups of volunteer ex-soldiers who formed themselves into military units under former officers. In the unsettled situation in Germany in November 1918 *Freikorps* units emerged all over the country. Politically they were unreliable and, although they had little time for the socialist government in Berlin, they saw communism as a more immediate threat.

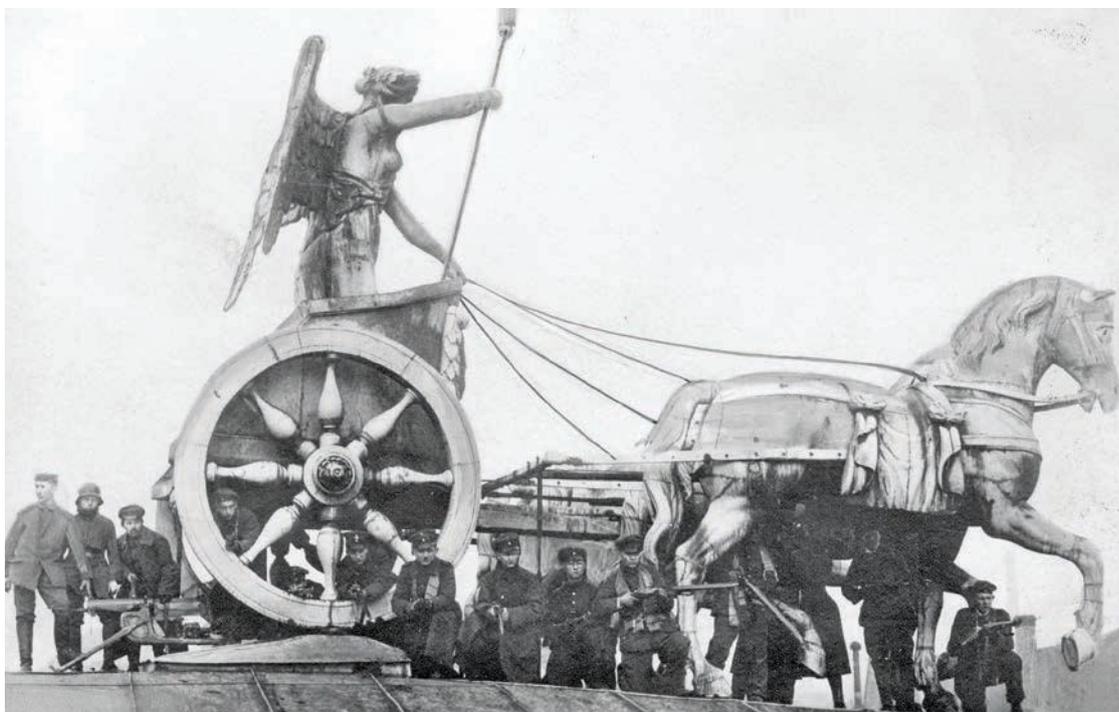
The Ebert Government ordered Gustav Noske to restore order in the capital, and, using *Freikorps* units, the Spartacist uprising was put down. The *Freikorps* carried out their task with some brutality. Buildings seized by the Spartacists were recaptured. On 13 January, the Berlin workers called off the strike, and within days the Spartacist uprising had been crushed. Among those killed in the violence were Karl Liebknecht, who had supported the attempted uprising, and Rosa Luxemburg, who had initially opposed it. They were arrested and murdered by *Freikorps* troops. Four months later, Luxemburg's body was dredged out of an ice-covered Berlin canal.

The Spartacist uprising, and the other attempts at political violence in 1919, was an important feature of the German Revolution. It revealed not only the vulnerability of the new government, but also an issue it could never resolve – the importance of the army in German politics. The leaders of the army never supported the republic or the new democracy; their loyalty at this stage was to the old Germany. In 1919 they supported the new republic mainly because they saw the threat from the extreme left as the greater danger.



Corbis/Michael Nicholson

SOURCE 1.9 Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) a leading member of the Spartacist movement. She was murdered by *Freikorps* members during the uprising in January 1919.



Alamy/dpa picture alliance

SOURCE 1.10 Armed *Freikorps* troops on top of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin during the Spartacist uprising in January 1919

The revolutionary activity of 1919 also left a deep and enduring hatred within the parties of the left: between the moderate German Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the more extreme German Communist Party (KPD), formed in December 1918. The KPD could never forgive the moderate socialist SPD Government for ordering the use of right-wing military groups like the *Freikorps* to suppress the Spartacist uprising. A great distrust between the parties of the left grew, and the divisions of the left never healed. These deep divisions in the left and their later inability to close ranks against the rise of the extreme right represented by the Nazis ultimately helped the Nazis into power.

Bolshevism



SOURCE 1.11 'Bolshevism means drowning the world in blood', an anti-communist poster of 1919

Questions

- 1 What is Bolshevism? How is it represented in this poster?
- 2 Explain why Bolshevism was seen as such a threat to Germany in 1919.
- 3 Which groups in German society would have been opposed to Bolshevism?
- 4 Why did the attempt by the Spartacists to seize power in 1919 fail?

AN ATTACK FROM THE RIGHT – THE KAPP PUTSCH

In 1920, the government faced another challenge to its authority, but this time it came not from the extreme left, but from the extreme right. Right-wing elements in German society had never accepted the republic. It was associated with Germany's military defeat, with the humiliation of the peace treaty, political and social disorder and economic hardship.

The immediate cause of the Kapp *Putsch* was the government's attempt to carry out the military clauses of the much-hated Treaty of Versailles. In March 1920, when the government ordered the dissolution of the Ehrhardt Brigade, a *Freikorps* group stationed outside Berlin, the military commander of the city, General von Lüttwitz, refused to obey. Lüttwitz, who had formed

a conspiracy with other right-wing officers and civilians, ordered the Ehrhardt Brigade to march on the city.

Chancellor Bauer and President Ebert expected the army to protect the government from this challenge from the right as they had protected the government from the earlier challenges from the Spartacists; however, the leader of the army (or *Reichswehr* as it was now called), General von Seeckt, refused to allow the army to intervene. Von Seeckt and most of the officer corps sympathised with the rebels, and, with the army unwilling to protect the government, President Ebert, Chancellor Bauer and the cabinet were forced to leave Berlin. The military leaders of the *Putsch* declared a new government headed by another conspirator, the radical right-wing politician Wolfgang Kapp.

The Kapp *Putsch* had little chance of success and it failed in a few days because of the defiance of the Berlin working class. In response to this challenge from the right, a general strike was declared by workers and trade unions, which was very effective and quickly paralysed the city. Moreover, it became clear that middle-class Germans had little sympathy for the rebels. Civil servants who ran the German bureaucracy and the banking system supported the strike and within a few days the *Putsch* had collapsed. Von Lüttwitz and Kapp fled the city and the legal government returned.

Significance of the Kapp *Putsch*

The Kapp *Putsch* may appear insignificant and almost comical in its failure, but it had some important implications for the German democracy. It was the first attempt to seize power by the elements of the radical right, and it exposed the weakness of the government, whose president and elected leaders had been forced to flee the capital.

The Kapp *Putsch* once again revealed the growing power of the German army within the state and the sympathy of the army leadership for right-wing German politics. The army had been prepared to protect the state from threats from the left, but it could not be relied on to protect the state from threats from the right.



Bundesarchiv/Oscar Teilmann

SOURCE 1.12 General Hans von Seeckt (1866–1936) with officers of the German army in 1925. The army was always a significant element in German politics in the 1920s and 1930s.

POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Throughout its existence, the Weimar Republic faced almost constant political instability. There were many political parties in the German *Reichstag*; some major, others no more than fringe groups with very few members. Since no one party was ever strong enough to govern in its own right there had to be compromise, which in turn created uncertainty, instability and weakness. Similarly, many of the political parties had narrow views focused only on protecting their own sectional interests and the groups in German society that supported them.

The German Reichstag in December 1924

MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

PARTIES OF THE LEFT

Communist Party of Germany (KPD) (*Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*)

- Party of the extreme left
- Influenced by Moscow
- Opposed to democracy
- Working-class support
- Anti-republican

Social Democratic Party (SPD) (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*)

- Moderate party of the left
- The largest party in the *Reichstag* to 1932
- Democratic
- Wanted gradual social reform
- Working-class support

PARTIES OF THE CENTRE

German Democratic Party (DDP) (*Deutsche Demokratische Partei*)

- Liberal democratic party
- Moderate
- Supported the republic
- Middle-class support

Centre Party (ZP) (*Zentrumspartei*)

- Moderate broad-based party
- Middle-class support
- Supported the republic
- Supported Catholic interests
- Democratic
- Opposed to socialism

PARTIES OF THE RIGHT

German People's Party (DVP) (*Deutsche Volkspartei*)

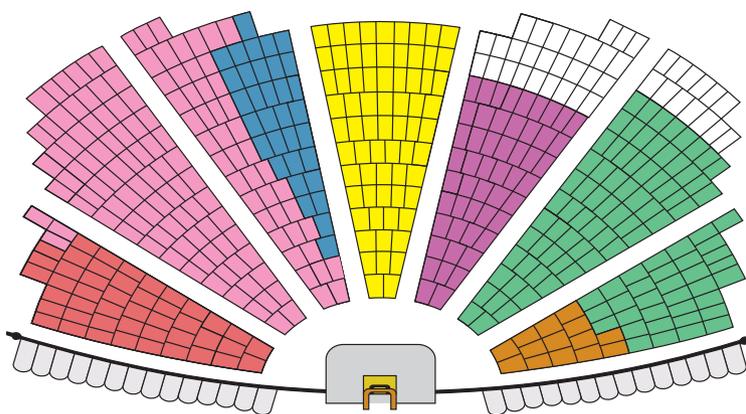
- Moderate right-wing
- Anti-communist
- Anti-socialist
- Democratic

German National People's Party (DNVP) (*Deutsche Nationale Volkspartei*)

- Right-wing conservative party
- Anti-republican
- Anti-communist
- Pro-monarchy

National Socialist German Worker's Party (NSDAP – Nazi) (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*)

- Party of the extreme right-wing
- Nationalistic
- Anti-republican
- Anti-communist
- Anti-democratic
- Anti-socialist
- Anti-Semitic



Composition of the *Reichstag* after the elections of December 1924: 493 seats

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| ■ KPD | ■ DDP | ■ DVP | ■ NAZI |
| ■ SPD | ■ ZP | ■ DNVP | ■ Other small parties |

continued

continued



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 1.13 The German *Reichstag* in session during the Weimar Republic

Questions

- 1 Identify the largest political party in the *Reichstag* in December 1924.
- 2 Identify the largest political party of the left and the largest political party of the right.
- 3 Explain why the Centre Party would have significant influence in the German Government.

Within German society certain classes tended to support certain parties. As a broad rule, the working class tended to support the parties of the left, whereas many more cautious middle-class Germans and rural people tended to support right-wing political groups. Right-wing views were also held by various powerful groups in German society, including the military leadership, the industrialists, the land-owning aristocracy and the civil service. They always saw the left as a great threat to Germany's future.

In Germany during the Weimar era the more moderate parties of the left and the right tended to support the new democracy, while the two parties at the extremes, the German communists (KPD) on the extreme left and the Nazis, the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP) on the extreme right, wanted to overthrow the democracy, the republic and the political system as it existed.

POLITICAL VIOLENCE – ‘THE ENEMY STANDS ON THE RIGHT’

In May 1921, the economist Joseph Wirth became the new Chancellor, leading a coalition government of the Socialists (SPD), the Germany Democratic Party (DDP) and the Centre Party. Wirth was a firm believer in democracy and the republic, and he included in his government another true republican, the Jewish industrialist Walther Rathenau as his foreign minister.

Wirth and Rathenau were the architects of the policy of fulfilment. For the good of the nation they felt it was necessary for Germany to seek to fulfil the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. They believed that Germany's efforts to meet its obligations would create a situation in which the country would then be in a position to renegotiate and modify some of the terms of the settlement.

The policy of fulfilment generated intense opposition from the right-wing of German politics. The right-wing of German politics encompassed many groups. There were the *Junkers*, the conservative landowning class of the old Germany who could never accept the idea of a republic; there were the traditional orders who governed Germany, the civil service, the judiciary and the educational system, which were also dominated by people who had no great faith in the republic; there was the army, which could never accept the defeat; and there were nationalists of all persuasions, who looked for a restoration of German honour and power. These groups tended to be not only anti-socialist and anti-communist, but they were also anti-democratic and they were a constant challenge to the Weimar Republic.

Between 1919 and 1922 there were over 370 political murders, most of them the action of the extreme right. In August 1921 two ex-officers of the *Freikorps* brigade, which had failed in



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 1.14 More than 500 000 people gathered in Berlin on 10 July 1922 to protest the assassination of Walter Rathenau.

the Kapp *Putsch*, shot dead the politician Matthias Erzberger, one of the so-called ‘November criminals’ who had signed the armistice in 1918. Many Germans openly rejoiced at the news of his murder. In June 1922 right-wing extremists gunned down foreign minister Walther Rathenau in a Berlin street. Apart from the fact that he was Jewish, Rathenau’s crime in the eyes of the extreme right was that he was supportive of the policy of fulfilment.

The shock of Rathenau’s assassination caused the government to use Article 48 of the constitution and introduce a *Law for the Protection of the Republic*, a law aimed at curbing the excesses of extreme right-wing groups. ‘There stands the enemy,’ said Chancellor Wirth. ‘There can be no doubt about it – the enemy stands on the right.’³ But despite the law and the outrage, right-wing groups that came before the courts were treated mildly by a legal system that was itself right-wing.

Economic challenges for the Weimar Republic

The economic hardships Germany faced in the early 1920s were caused by a combination of external factors and the failure of the government itself to carry out economic reform. The German economy was always vulnerable after 1919 and many of the problems at this time were linked to the economic demands of the Treaty of Versailles. Germany had lost territory and industrial resources, and immediately after the war the nation had little capacity for economic recovery. Key industrial resources had been lost; Germany had little export trade, and was unable to attract any major foreign investment or loans.

Moreover, the government itself was weak and vulnerable to pressure from the left and the right, and it was not prepared to carry through the necessary economic reforms because they would have added to the suffering of the people. One alternative was to raise taxes, but the industrialists in particular resisted this because they actually benefited from inflation; there was also the fear that raising taxes would increase unemployment.

To get more money the government response was simply to print more money and so the value of the German currency continued to fall. Before the war, one US dollar was worth 4.2 marks, but by January 1920 one US dollar was worth 64.8 marks, and by January 1923 it was worth 17 972 marks. In this sense the German Government itself, by failing to reform the finances and increase taxation, was a major cause of the inflation of the early 1920s. In May 1921 came the added but not unexpected burden when Germany was presented with the reparations bill for the war – 132 billion marks to be paid in annual amounts of 2 billion marks.

OCCUPATION OF THE RUHR, 1923

The Wirth Government, following the policy of fulfilment, met the first reparations payment in August 1921. However, by the end of the year, with the economy weakening, Germany announced that it was unable to meet the second reparations deadline and Germany declared it was in default (behind) in the delivery of coal and telegraph poles to France. The following month French troops, with Belgian support, occupied the Ruhr, the most important industrial area of Germany.



Alamy/SZ Photo/Scherf

SOURCE 1.15 French troops pose with an armoured vehicle in the industrial city of Essen during the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923

The French Government was determined that Germany meet its obligations. It believed that the Germans had never accepted defeat and that France had to reassert its authority and demonstrate to its old enemy that France had both the strength and the will to force Germany to accept the Treaty of Versailles.

The French occupation of the Ruhr triggered a wave of feeling throughout Germany. Political parties united in their condemnation of the French action and the government called for a policy of ‘passive resistance’ in the Ruhr. Germans in the Ruhr went on strike and the French in turn were forced to bring in workers to mine and move the coal. More than 100 000 French troops were used to control the restless population and to deal with acts of sabotage by right-wing extremists. Thousands of Germans were forcibly removed from the Ruhr, industrial leaders who refused to cooperate were imprisoned, and acts of violence increased, including the shooting of 12 German workers at the Krupp steelworks in March 1923.

The effective shutdown of the vital industrial area of the Ruhr in 1923 and the policy of passive resistance had disastrous results for the already failing German economy. The government had pledged to support and pay the wages of the Germans resisting in the Ruhr. At the same time, the government was forced to spend its scarce foreign currency reserves to import coal to support other German industries that used Ruhr coal.

ECONOMIC COLLAPSE AND HYPERINFLATION, 1923

By the summer of 1923 government costs had soared by some 700 per cent. The inflation that had plagued the German economy since the war now quickly degenerated into the phenomenon

of hyperinflation, in which the Germans experienced a rapid fall in the value of their currency on a daily basis, to the point that it rapidly became worthless. The *Reichsbank* and the government had no answer to the problem as 2000 printing presses worked day and night to print money. By August there were over 44 trillion marks in circulation, with the presses producing another 46 billion marks a day. Prices in Germany were linked to the exchange rate, and by the start of September 1923 one US dollar was worth 10 million marks. By the end of the month, the figure stood at 160 million marks. In November, at the height of the inflation, one US dollar was worth 4.2 trillion marks. Banks charged 35 per cent interest per day on loans. One American politician visiting Berlin paid 1500 million marks for his evening meal and thoughtfully left a small tip of 400 million marks.

The collapse of the German economy in 1923 caused great suffering in the country, but not all Germans suffered; indeed some sections of society were able to profit from the inflation. The landowning class was generally not affected and the smaller farming class also survived the full impact of the hyperinflation. Food was always a valuable commodity and farmers were able to increase their wealth by bartering, which became a widespread practice as the currency became worthless. However, it was the industrialists and the business class who gained the most from Germany's economic woes. They were able to wipe out their debts with the inflated currency, and business interests that had access to foreign currency or had the ability to sell on foreign markets made enormous profits.



SOURCE 1.16 A chef standing outside the door of his restaurant in Berlin in April 1923. With the cost of a meal at 2800 marks, the inflation was just beginning. It was not unknown for the prices in restaurants to increase during the meal.

By June 1923 the government had lost control of the economy. Strikes swept the country as workers protested about the rising unemployment and the failure of their wages to keep up with the cost of living. Middle-class Germans also suffered as the value of their hard-earned savings became worthless.

The impact of hyperinflation

TABLE 1.1 Cost of a loaf of bread in Berlin 1918–23

Year	Month	Cost of a loaf of bread (in marks)
1918		0.63
1923	January	250.00
	July	3465.00
	September	1512 000.00
	November	201 000 000 000.00



akg-images/vollstein bild – Harald Lange

SOURCE 1.17 A one-billion mark note issued during the hyperinflation

TABLE 1.2 Exchange rate US\$1 to the German mark

Year	German mark equivalent to US\$1
December 1919	47
July 1922	493
December 1922	7000
July 1923	353 000
August 1923	4 500 000
October 1923	25 260 000 000
December 1923	4 000 000 000 000

The reality of hyperinflation, 1923

Life became tragi-comic. Anyone with access to even a few dollars or pounds sterling became a trillionaire overnight. But it often proved impossible to change one hundred dollars into German currency since even the banks did not have enough paper money available and anyway it would have required a lorry to transport the money. An unskilled worker who in 1913 had been earning 25 marks a week was earning 530 million marks a week in September 1923. He would have needed a wheelbarrow to take home his weekly wage. A pensioner who in 1913 had invested the sum of 100 000 marks would have found his account worth less than a few cents in 1923. A couple who owned a large house before the war and received an income from letting the rooms would find in 1923 that the cost of replacing a broken pane of glass was more than all the rents they had ever received from their tenants.

S Taylor, *Germany 1918–1933*, Duckworth and Co, London, 1983, p. 53.

Questions

- 1 Explain why Germany suffered hyperinflation in 1923.
- 2 Which groups in German society are identified in this extract as being affected by the hyperinflation?

Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929)

Gustav Stresemann was one of the few outstanding political figures of the Weimar Republic. Born in 1878 into a middle-class Berlin family, Stresemann was a businessman before he entered politics. He was a man of great self-confidence, courage and personal charm, who believed that success in politics, as in business, came from an accurate assessment of the facts and a realistic assessment of what was possible.

Stresemann had supported the war effort and the monarchy, but after the republic was proclaimed, he accepted the reality of the new political situation and became one of its true champions. He was a nationalist who distrusted both the radical left and the radical right with their resort to political violence and their *Putsch* attempts. He believed that the way ahead for Germany was not through resistance, but through coming to terms with the situation.

Stresemann, who led the German People's Party (DVP), became Chancellor of Germany in August 1923, a critical time in the history of the Weimar Republic. Stresemann's first major



SOURCE 1.18 Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929) German Chancellor and later foreign minister with his family



akg-images/allstein bild – Atelier Binder

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step was to call off the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr. It was an act of great political courage and it enraged German nationalists, who saw it as a betrayal of the nation and its honour. Then, with special emergency powers given to him by the *Reichstag*, Stresemann tackled the issue of the hyperinflation. The printing of worthless currency ceased and the mark was recalled. A new currency, called the *Rentenmark*, was put into circulation, backed by the value of all German land and industrial assets. To prevent the *rentenmark* from being devalued, there were strict controls on the number issued, and its exchange rate was fixed at about 4.2 *rentenmarks* to the US dollar, with each *rentenmark* being worth about one billion of the old marks.

The government also carried out long overdue economic reforms. The budget was balanced, government expenditure was cut, particularly after the ending of passive resistance, and new taxes were introduced. These bold measures ended the inflation and stabilised the currency. In 1924 the *rentenmark*, which was always intended to be a temporary currency, was itself withdrawn and a new German mark was introduced.

When Stresemann ceased to be Chancellor in November 1923, he became foreign minister in the new government. He held this position until his death in 1929. Stresemann had always been a nationalist, but, unlike the extreme nationalists who raged against the injustice and hardship Germany had endured, he believed that Germany could recover its place in the world by peaceful negotiation and he sought to restore Germany to the position of a great and respected European power. He aimed to end the diplomatic isolation of Germany in world affairs, to undo the injustice of the Treaty of Versailles and, in the long term, to recover lost German territory in Eastern Europe.



SOURCE 1.19 One *Rentenmark*, the new currency introduced in November 1923. With a conversion rate of one *Rentenmark* to 1 billion of the worthless mark, the currency was stabilised and the German economy started to recover.

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To achieve this it was necessary to come to terms with the former enemies. Stresemann was a diplomat of great skill and ability and he sought to achieve his goals by careful and patient diplomacy. In 1924 he was involved in negotiations that created the Dawes Plan, which helped German economic recovery. In the years that followed he negotiated the Locarno Treaty in 1925, which saw Germany accepted as an equal by its former enemies, and in 1926 Germany took its place in the League of Nations. Shortly before his death, Stresemann was involved with the Young Plan, which reduced Germany's reparations figure.

Stresemann's achievements both as Chancellor and as foreign minister place him as one of the most important figures of the Weimar Republic. His policies initiated German economic recovery from 1924 to 1929 and through his skilful diplomacy he restored Germany to a position of equality in Europe and fostered the genuine spirit of goodwill that characterised the late 1920s. In 1926 he and the French foreign minister Aristide Briand won the Nobel Peace Prize for their contribution to the new spirit of reconciliation.

When Stresemann died suddenly in October 1929 aged only 51, the republic lost one of its true supporters. His loss came at a particularly bad time. A few weeks after his death, the New York stock market collapsed as a consequence of lost confidence in the US financial system and the Great Depression began. Historians have speculated that German history may have been different if Stresemann had been alive to guide his country through the Great Depression.



SOURCE 1.20 The front cover of the German magazine *Simplicissimus*, 14 May 1923. The caption reads: 'He looks to the right, he looks to the left – he will save me'.

Questions

- 1 How did Stresemann deal with hyperinflation?
- 2 Explain the meaning of the image on the cover of *Simplicissimus* (Source 1.20).
- 3 The magazine *Simplicissimus* reported Stresemann's death in October 1929. Prepare your own summary of Stresemann's work and influence which could have appeared in that edition.

The years of stability, 1924–29

From 1924 the German economy entered a period of relative stability. In 1924 the Dawes Plan revised the reparations figure by accepting the principle that it should be linked to Germany's capacity to pay. It also marked the start of foreign loans being made available to Germany to finance development. It was a time when some of the bitterness of the First World War finally eased, and Germany was accepted back as an equal in the European community.

However, the economic prosperity of the 1920s was built on weak foundations. The greatest danger was that Germany was living off borrowed money, and that it was over-dependent on foreign loans and investments. By 1929 Germany had a foreign debt of almost 25 billion marks. If this money supply were to cease, then the German economy would collapse. This is what happened in 1930.

Another weakness in the economy was that economic power was concentrated in the hands of influential industrialists and bankers. Despite the fact that this group opposed the republic and the idea of parliamentary democracy, they nonetheless increased their wealth and influence under the republican system.

Throughout this period, unemployment remained high, rising from 5 per cent unemployed in 1924 to almost 9 per cent or 8.5 million in 1929. In rural Germany agriculture remained depressed. There was a growing agricultural debt and the farming community was unable to share in the prosperity of the urban and industrial centres. As prices fell, rural Germany became a source of support for Hitler, with almost half of the Nazi votes in 1932 coming from rural areas.

SOCIETY DURING THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

The 1920s saw Germany become an increasingly modern, industrialised, urban society. The standard of living for many Germans began to improve, there was growing consumerism and increasing demand for goods. For Germany it was also an era of great creative freedom and, despite the political and economic difficulties, the Weimar era is also remembered as the period that saw the flowering of a brilliant culture, which made Germany the European centre of creative expression in music, film, art, architecture and literature, and transformed Berlin into one of the most exciting cities in Europe.

MODERNISM AND THE NEW FREEDOMS OF EXPRESSION

The Germans were the best-educated people in Europe and ideas had always been highly valued.

The new constitution made Weimar Germany a more tolerant, open society, as freedoms were guaranteed and censorship was abolished. It was a society that valued free expression, and until the Nazis came to power in 1933, Germans had a brief opportunity to give full expression to their creativity. German society after 1918 provided the opportunity for many who had been 'outsiders' to gain acceptance.

The inspiration of much of this creative cultural work of the 1920s was **modernism**, the challenge to traditional forms of artistic and creative expression and the quest to confront the existing system with the innovative and the experimental. It was as if a creative force, long suppressed under the conservative restraints of Imperial Germany, had suddenly been given the opportunity to express itself. 'Everything became possible,' wrote one observer, 'everything became EXperience with a capital E and a capital X.'⁴

modernism

A movement in thinking and the creative arts that challenged the traditional. It began at the end of the 19th century as creative artists began to challenge the old and embrace the new and modern. Modernism thrived in the free and creative environment of Weimar Germany.



alg-images/ulstein bild - V. Pawlowski

SOURCE 1.21 The good times. Traffic at the intersection of *Unter den Linden* and *Friedrichstraße* in central Berlin, 1928. Germany enjoyed a period of political stability and economic upturn from 1924 until the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.

Within the creative arts, artists, writers and filmmakers sought to convey experiences and emotions in their work. Provocative theatre and **cabaret** flourished in the decade, much of it with a political and social message. One figure of the time who achieved lasting fame was Bertolt Brecht. Brecht, with the composer Kurt Weill, wrote *The Threepenny Opera*, a production that enjoyed enormous success when it appeared in 1928. Brecht was a communist and much of his work conveyed his disillusionment with capitalist middle-class society.

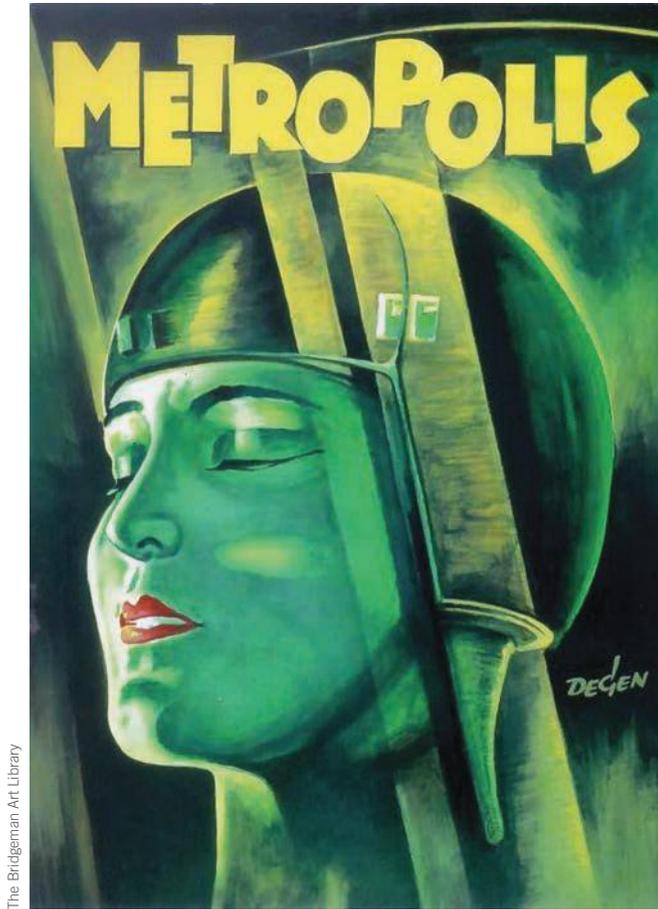
cabaret

Entertainment with music and dance. Cabaret was usually performed in clubs and was a very popular form of entertainment in Weimar Germany.

Music flourished with world-renowned conductors like Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter and the production of new and innovative operatic works.

In the field of cinema Berlin became a world leader, and the progressive German film industry of the 1920s produced more films in that decade than the rest of Europe combined. It was the home of many brilliant directors, such as Fritz Lang, Joseph von Sternberg and Ernst Lubitsch, and the cinematic masterpieces it produced included the futuristic science fiction film *Metropolis*, the expressionist horror film *Nosferatu*, based on the vampire legend of Dracula and *The Blue Angel*, which launched its star Marlene Dietrich to world attention.

The decade also saw the flowering of a brilliant literature with writers such as Thomas Mann, Hermann Hesse and Erich Maria Remarque. Former conscript Remarque's classic anti-war novel about the First World War, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was published in 1928. The British writer Christopher Isherwood who lived in Berlin during the 1930s captured this creative and liberated society in a series of novels and short stories. Two of his later works, *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) formed the inspiration for *Cabaret*, a popular musical and film many years later.



The Bridgeman Art Library

SOURCE 1.22 A poster for Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927), the expressionist science fiction film, the first of its genre, about a futuristic society.

who used new techniques to express feelings and emotions. Much of German art, not surprisingly, reflected the suffering and hardship that many Germans had endured. Among the significant painters of the period were Otto Dix, noted for his realistic depictions of Weimar society and the brutality of war, Paul Klee, Max Beckmann, Heinrich Zille, and George Grosz who criticised middle-class conservative society in a series of harsh drawings and caricatures. In the 1920s Berlin equalled Paris as the world centre of modern art.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The cultural outpouring of the Weimar Republic took place against a background of scientific and technological advances. German scientists won seven Nobel prizes during the decade and the most famous scientist of the age, Albert Einstein, worked in Germany until 1933. There were advances in communication and transport: a modern radio system was developed, new roads and railways were built, and the motor industry (which included the development of the Mercedes and the BMW) flourished. In the air the Germans impressed the world with the development of the first great passenger airship, the *Graf Zeppelin*. Completed in 1928 by the *Luftschiffbau Zeppelin* Company, this rigid airship filled with hydrogen made crossings to the United States and South America, and on one occasion flew around the world.

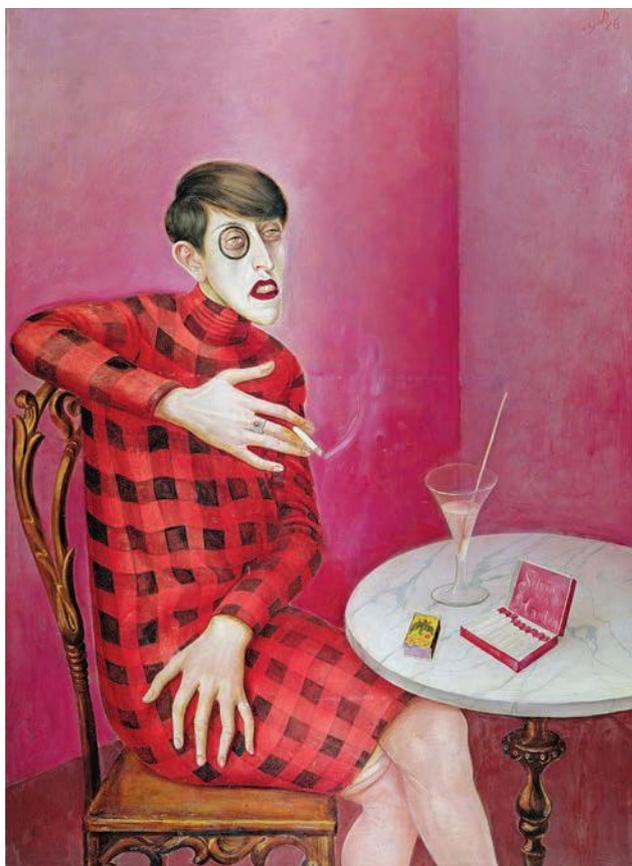
From the Germany of the 1920s modernism saw a challenge to the traditions of architecture and design with the famous Bauhaus school of architecture. Founded by the architect Walter Gropius in 1919, the Bauhaus school (named after the building in which it was centred) believed that art should work with the new technology and that there should be an emphasis on functional design, not only in buildings but also in items of daily use, such as furniture. Like so many other aspects of cultural life, this new school of architecture reflected the modernism of the time. There was a rejection of the older, more traditional styles of architecture and design, and a search for new form and function as the design model for the future.

There were significant changes in the world of art itself. Expressionism, particularly in art, was a feature of modernism. In Expressionist painting the world and reality were interpreted through the perception of the artists,

OPPOSITION TO SOCIAL CHANGE

In his 1986 study entitled *Weimar Culture*, the German-born historian Peter Gay explored the conflict in German society between modernist and anti-modernist, the fact that the cultural freedom of the Weimar Republic divided German society, creating a clash of values between the old and the new. The experimentation and exuberance of the era and the new freedoms of cultural expression upset a large portion of the population. The daring and confronting nature of this new style unsettled many conservatives and there was a great divide between artistic groups and many ordinary Germans who found the new cultural freedom unacceptable. They saw Weimar culture as degenerate or superficial and a challenge to Germany's cultural past. To some, particularly on the right, this new, unacceptable culture was a reflection on the republican government that

had allowed it to flourish. The Nazis in particular were violently opposed to the modernism of the Weimar era. Ultimately, they would define their own culture for the German people and it is not surprising that many who had been part of the creative cultural life of Germany in the 1920s were forced to leave Germany when the Nazis came to power in the 1930s.



Corbis/The Gallery Collection

SOURCE 1.23 Otto Dix, *Portrait of the journalist Sylvia von Harden*, 1926. This stark expressionist portrait symbolised the new liberated society and the modern woman of Weimar Germany. 'I must paint you. I simply must,' Dix said to von Harden. 'You are representative of an entire epoch!'

SOCIAL REFORM AND SOCIAL TENSION

Germany already had a system of social welfare and the Weimar era saw further developments. The influence of trade unions increased and German workers achieved better conditions, such as improved wages and working conditions, including the eight-hour day. There were also social welfare improvements, sickness insurance, and in 1927 a national unemployment insurance scheme was set up.

However, there always remained social tensions within German society. Before the war German society had a rigid class system with the aristocratic landowning *Junkers* at the top, and the working-class and agrarian workers very much at the bottom. After the experience of war these rigid class and social divisions lessened, but they never completely broke down.

Privileged society based on wealth survived and a growing conservative German middle class also sought to protect their position and advantage in society. Although there were improvements for the German working class, they remained at the lower end of the social scale. Improvements in working conditions were resented by big business, which saw their profits under threat. The division between the German middle class and the working class was always there. Social divisions were made worse by social change and social hardship. The hyperinflation of 1923 caused great hardship, particularly to middle-class Germans. There were massive social hardships when the full impact of the Great Depression was felt in Germany after 1929. Stable democracy was not helped by social unrest and its effectiveness was seriously undermined by another feature of German society at this time, the prevalence of unpredictable street violence.

Violence and social divisions

One of the persistent problems of the Weimar Republic was the level of violence in German society. Street fighting was a frequent feature of life; even in the good years from 1924 to 1929, some 170 members of different paramilitary groups were killed. By the early 1930s, as political and economic disorder returned, the violence escalated even further as political groups used paramilitary groups in politics.

The *Stahlhelm* (Steel Helmets), an ex-servicemen's association made up of former *Freikorps* members, was a right-wing force that supported the German National People's Party, while the Red Front Fighters' League (*Der Rote Frontkämpferbund*) supported the German Communist Party. From the late 1920s, the Nazi Party had its own very effective paramilitary group in the SA (*Sturmabteilung*) or Storm-troopers in their distinctive brown shirts.

LOOKING BACK ON THE WEIMAR ERA

For many years there was a tendency to see the 14 years of the Weimar era merely as a prelude to the Nazi era; however, in more recent times, historians have focused more attention on the Weimar era itself, seeing it as a period of significant political, social and cultural innovation. It is also important for the simple fact that if the Weimar Republic and German democracy had survived there would have been no Hitler, and world history would have been very different.

Historians face a simple question with a very complex answer – why did the Weimar Republic fail? Did the democracy have a chance or was it, in the words of the German historian Ursula Büttner, an 'overburdened and abused democracy' that finally collapsed in the face of continued challenges, including the Great Depression and the Nazi movement? In researching this important era of German history, two broad lines of argument have emerged – the first that the Weimar Republic was doomed from the start.

Historians agree that from its beginning, the Weimar Republic suffered from a number of structural weaknesses. These structural weaknesses included the role of privileged groups and the army who maintained their influence in the republic, the authoritarian tradition in German history, weaknesses in the constitutional and party system, and the fact that, from the start, the republic suffered setbacks and was unable to gain legitimate acceptance. It did not have broad popular support, and was hammered by periods of severe economic hardship, political instability and unrest. Unlike pre-war Germany with traditions of order and stability, the new republic was a foreign concept. In the words of the British historian Richard Bessel, the Weimar Republic was 'a gamble which stood virtually no chance of success'.⁵

Although, as we have seen, the republic overcame the early challenges to its survival, the fundamental problems remained, even during the so-called good years from 1924 to 1929. As a result, the republic was vulnerable and could

continued

continued

not therefore survive the final onslaught of the Depression and the Nazis. For want of a better name, this argument is sometimes called the ‘determinist view’ – that the republic was ‘doomed from the start’.

Other historians accept the structural weaknesses, but do not believe that the republic was doomed from the start and there was absolutely nothing inevitable about its collapse and the coming to power of Hitler and the Nazis. The Weimar Republic, they suggest, was in fact very resilient. One of the leading German historians on the Weimar era was Detlev Peukert. In his book *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (1987), he rejected the idea that the failure of German democracy was inevitable, ‘nothing was predestined’, he wrote, ‘every failure and crisis could have been overcome’. Another German historian, Carl Ludwig Holtfrerich, also rejects the idea that the republic was doomed from the start. He accepts the weaknesses of the republic, and the economic problems of the 1920s, but believes that the republic could have dealt with the economic challenges if there had been capable and strong political leadership. Holtfrerich has argued that the republic lacked political leadership when it was most needed. There was no lack of options in dealing with the depression, just a ‘lack of determination’.

Conclusion

In the period 1924 to 1929, the Weimar Republic appeared to have overcome the early problems and enjoyed a measure of stability and economic growth. Historians who have examined these ‘middle years’ have asked why Germany missed this opportunity to consolidate the republic and place the democracy on a firmer footing, and why Germany was unable to take measures to lessen the full impact of the Great Depression after 1929. Many historians believe that, without the Depression, the republic and German democracy would have had a chance. The Depression gave the Nazis their opportunity, and the vulnerability of the republic was once more exposed for what would be the final time.

There is no one cause that explains the failure of German democracy and it is wrong to suggest that the Weimar Republic failed because of the Nazis. The failure of the Weimar Republic was not an event but a process. Hitler was one factor in the process, but not the only factor. The Weimar Republic was burdened with more political and economic problems than most democracies could ever be expected to bear. Groups like the Nazis who opposed the republic were not genuine opposition groups, as in a democracy, but were in fact fanatical enemies who refused to accept the state. Because many Germans had no real attachment to democracy, there was therefore the distinct possibility that an alternative to the democratic system could emerge. After 1933 the Nazis provided that alternative.

Chapter summary

- + After signing an armistice that ended the First World War in November 1918, Germany became a republic and established a democratic system of government.
- + The democracy was challenged by revolutionary activity from political forces of the left and the right.
- + The Treaty of Versailles, which Germany was forced to sign in 1919, imposed severe restrictions on the nation and generated a legacy of intense bitterness.
- + 1923 was a particularly difficult year for Germany with its failing economy, the occupation of the Ruhr area by France and Belgium and the aggressive hyperinflation that destroyed the value of the Germany currency.
- + The German army was always a significant influence in German politics during the Weimar Republic.
- + Financial reforms, mainly the work of Gustav Stresemann, restored the German economy and the nation began a period of relative economic and political stability from 1924 to 1929.
- + Gustav Stresemann as Foreign Minister from 1924 also achieved success in restoring Germany's standing in the European community.
- + The period after 1923 saw the flowering of a brilliant creative culture in the arts and advances in science and technology.
- + Since a great deal of the German prosperity was based on foreign loans, especially from the United States, when the Great Depression began in 1929, the German economy suffered badly.
- + By 1930 Germany began to feel the full impact of the Depression, as unemployment rose and political unrest returned.

Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/germany>.

Further resources

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Gay, Peter, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider*, Harper, New York, 1968; WW Norton, NY, 2001.

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Mommsen, Hans, *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy*, University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Peukert, Detlev, JK, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1992.



Endnotes

- 1 Quoted in Wheeler-Bennett, J, *Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918–1945*, Macmillan, London, 1961, p. 52.
- 2 Noske, G, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, Berlin, 1920, p. 68.
- 3 Quoted in Eyck, E, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, Vol 1, Antheneum, New York, 1970, p. 217.
- 4 Menuhin, Yehudi, quoted in Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s*, Harper Row, New York, 1972, p. 12.
- 5 Bessel, Richard, 'Why did the Weimar Republic collapse?' in Ian Kershaw, ed, *Debates in Modern History – Weimar: Why Did German Democracy Fail?*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1990, p. 8.



Chapter review activities

- 1 Place these events in chronological order:
 - + The occupation of the Ruhr
 - + Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles
 - + The Spartacist uprising
 - + The Kapp *Putsch*
 - + The start of the Great Depression
 - + Hyperinflation reaches its peak
 - + Paul von Hindenburg elected President of Germany
 - + The Dawes Plan
- 2 Draw a line to connect the terms in Group A to the relevant description in Group B.

Group A

Reparations

Reichswehr

Rentenmark

Rhineland

Reichstag

Ruhr

Freikorps

Posen

Bertolt Brecht

Wolfgang Kapp

Walter Rathenau

Karl Liebknecht

Group B

Extreme right-wing politician

The German Parliament

German currency in 1923

Payments for war damage

German politician assassinated in 1922

Involved in the cultural life of the Weimar Republic

Part of Prussia given to the new state of Poland in 1919

The German army

An industrial area of Germany

Military units mainly of right-wing ex-soldiers

Extreme left-wing politician

A demilitarised area of Germany

- 3 Prepare a list of dot points under the headings 'Internal pressures' and 'External pressures' to help explain why the Weimar Republic ultimately failed.
- 4 Right-wing or left-wing? Draw a line and mark three positions: 'Extreme left', 'Centre' and 'Extreme right'. Place the following groups at a point along the line that you feel best reflects their political position in Weimar Germany:
 - a German army
 - b German Communist Party (KPD)
 - c German Social Democratic Party (SPD)
 - d German Democratic Party (DDP)
 - e Centre Party.
- 5 In the early years of the Weimar Republic there was a challenge to its authority from the left in January 1919 and from the right in March 1920. Identify:
 - a the names of the two groups
 - b the aims of the two groups
 - c the leadership of the two groups
 - d the outcome for the two groups
 - e why the republic survived these two challenges.
- 6 Why was a left-wing revolution possible in Germany immediately after the First World War and why did it fail?
- 7 Why were so many Germans bitter about the Treaty of Versailles? Include in your response your assessment of whether this bitterness was justified.
- 8 Prepare a two-column list with the headings 'Strengths of the Weimar Constitution' and 'Weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution'. In the appropriate column, list what you consider to be the strengths and weakness of the constitution. Select one item from each of your columns and explain, in an extended paragraph, why you believe this strength and weakness were significant.
- 9 Prepare a list of arguments both for and against the following statement:
'By 1928, the year before the onset of the Great Depression, the Weimar Republic had achieved success and a measure of stability and that the long-term outlook for its continued survival was positive.'
- 10 Prepare a multimedia presentation on the life of Gustav Stresemann, addressing the following issues:
 - a the significant events in his life
 - b the contribution Stresemann made to German history.



Essay questions

- 11 What were the major political, economic and social problems faced by the Weimar Republic?
- 12 ‘The Weimar Republic failed through lack of leadership.’ Is this a satisfactory explanation for the troubles faced by the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1929?
- 13 Identify the main elements in German society that supported and opposed the idea of a German democratic republic.
- 14 Evaluate the view that from 1924 to 1929, Weimar Germany enjoyed not only a period of political and economic stability, but also achieved a degree of social reform and creative cultural expression.



a kg-images/K Stauber

CHAPTER TWO



The Nazis rise to power

The National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) was one of many small right-wing political groups that emerged in Germany after the First World War. These were groups that fed off the political uncertainty at the time, and the anger and frustration at what had befallen Germany. When the Weimar Republic achieved a degree of stabilisation, most of these political groups failed, or, in the case of the Nazis, declined to the point where they were of no consequence in the political landscape.

In the elections of 1928 the Nazis won only 12 of the 491 seats in the German *Reichstag*, yet just five years later in January 1933 they came to power legally when their leader Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.

The victory of Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933 was one of the most significant historical events of the 20th century and, like most significant events, there is no simple explanation for why it happened.

◀ A Nazi Party poster of 1935 entitled *Long Live Germany* depicts Hitler at the head of a vast army of followers.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What were the origins and beliefs of the Nazi Party?
- + How did the Nazi Party come to power in Germany in 1933?

Adolf Hitler and the origins of the Nazi Party

Any explanation of the success of the Nazis must take into account the central role of Adolf Hitler, for it is difficult to believe that the Nazis would have come to power without him. The British historian Ian Kershaw has argued that no other historical figure had a greater impact on 20th-century world history than Adolf Hitler.

“ The 12 years of Hitler’s rule permanently changed Germany, Europe and the world. He is one of the few individuals of whom it can be said with absolute certainty: without him the course of history would have been different.¹ ”



Adolf Hitler – the rise from obscurity

Hitler’s early life gave no hint of the extraordinary role he would later play in world history. He was born on 20 April 1889 in the small Austrian town of Braunau where his father, Alois Hitler, was a customs official with the Austrian civil service. His mother, Klara, who was devoted to her son, was a former servant girl.

The young Hitler had ability but performed poorly at school, reacting against discipline and not conforming in school life. Hitler had a poor relationship with his stern and inflexible father, who could not accept his lack of self-discipline and his growing interest in art, architecture and music. When Hitler’s father died in 1903, Klara had very little control over her headstrong son, and in 1905, aged 15, Hitler left school altogether. Two years later Hitler applied to enter the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, but his application was rejected. That same year his mother died and Hitler gradually descended into the world of the unemployed drifter, living an aimless existence on the streets of Vienna.



SOURCE 2.1 The class photo of Year IV in 1899: schoolboy Hitler aged 10 years is top row, fourth from left.

continued

continued

By 1910, aged 21, he was almost destitute and was forced to live at a shelter for homeless men. August Kubizek, one of the few people who knew Hitler at this time, wrote, 'He was at odds with the world; wherever he looked he saw injustice, hate, enmity. Nothing was free from criticism, nothing found favour in his eyes.'²

Many of Hitler's views of the world were shaped at this time. His belief that struggle was a core feature of life took shape in his mind, as did the idea that the strong survive and the weak do not. It was also in this world of struggle on the cold backstreets of Vienna that Hitler came into contact with the **anti-Semitism** that existed in the capital.

In 1913 Hitler left Vienna and moved across the border to Munich, the capital of the German state of Bavaria. Although he was not a German citizen when the First World War broke out in 1914, Hitler sought permission to join the German army and served the entire war as a loyal and conscientious soldier. He identified with the German army and it provided the support and security he had never known; amid the death, hardship and suffering of the trenches he had found a home.

The shock of Germany's defeat in 1918 had a profound impact on Hitler, as it did for so many other brave soldiers. He fervently believed in the 'stab in the back legend', the idea that Germany had been betrayed.



SOURCE 2.2 Corporal Hitler (sitting, front left) with a group of German soldiers during the First World War

Corbis

anti-Semitism

An attitude or action that is anti-Jewish

Hitler the soldier

Hitler was a committed soldier ... and did not lack physical courage. His immediate comrades, mainly a group of dispatch runners, respected him and it seems even quite liked him, though he could plainly irritate as well as puzzle them ... They referred to him as 'the artist' and were struck by the fact that he received no mail or parcels (even at Christmas), ... never spoke of family or friends, neither smoked nor drank, and used to sit for hours in a corner of the dug-out, brooding or reading ... His only real affection seems to have been his dog Foxl, a white terrier that had strayed across from enemy lines ... He felt as strongly about none of the thousands of humans he saw slaughtered about him. The emptiness and coldness that Hitler showed throughout his life in his dealing with human beings were absent in the feeling he had for his dog.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris 1889–1936*, Vol 1, Allen Lane, London, 1998, pp. 92–3.

Question

- 1 List four features of Hitler's personality that are evident in the extract on the previous page.



FROM THE BIRTH OF HITLER TO THE GREAT DEPRESSION

1889	APRIL	Adolf Hitler was born in the small town of Braunau in Austria
1903	JANUARY	The death of Hitler's father, Alois Hitler
1907	OCTOBER	Hitler failed to gain admission to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts
	DECEMBER	The death of Hitler's mother, Klara
1913	MAY	Hitler left Austria and moved to Munich in Germany
1914	AUGUST	The outbreak of the First World War; Hitler joined the German army
1918	AUGUST	Hitler was awarded the Iron Cross First Class
	NOVEMBER	The end of the First World War
1919	SEPTEMBER	Hitler joined the German Workers' Party in Munich
1923	NOVEMBER	The Nazis attempted to take power in Munich in the Beer Hall <i>Putsch</i>
1924	APRIL	Hitler was sentenced to five years' imprisonment
		Hitler began work on <i>Mein Kampf</i> while in prison
	DECEMBER	Hitler left prison after serving six months of his sentence
		Hitler started to rebuild the Nazi Party
1928	MAY	The Nazi Party won only 12 seats in the <i>Reichstag</i> elections
		Nazi Party membership reached 178 000
1929	OCTOBER	The start of the Great Depression

THE BEGINNING OF THE NAZI PARTY

After the war Hitler remained in the army and was given the task of reporting on the activities of the political groups in Munich. In this capacity he attended a meeting of a small political party called the German Workers' Party. This obscure group had a confused political program and only 40 members when Hitler attended one of its meetings in a back room of the Sternecker Brewery in Munich. A few weeks later, in September 1919, he became a member.

Hitler was put in charge of publicity and propaganda, and from 1919 he devoted all his energies to the party and sought to broaden its base and its appeal. In October 1919 he delivered his first speech to a large audience.

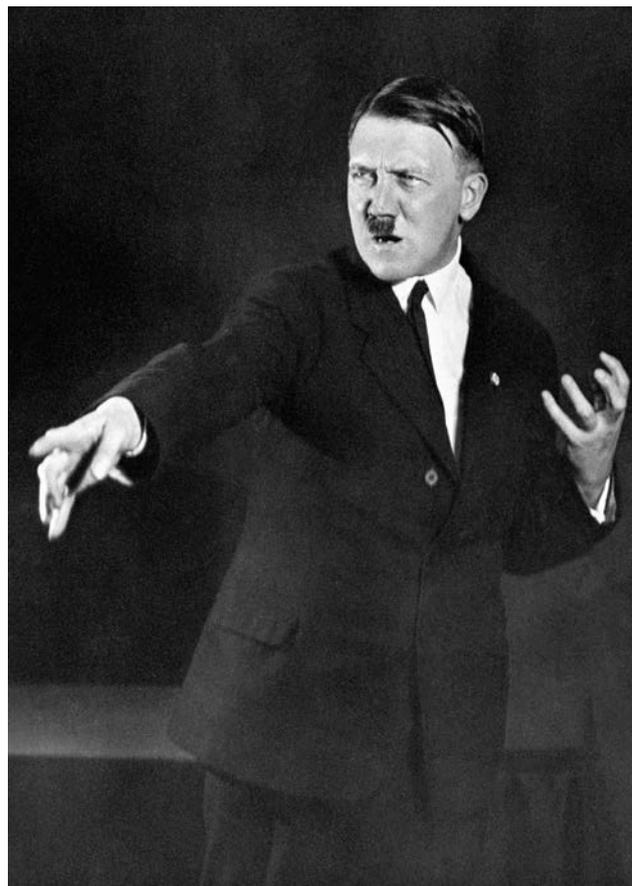
A few months later, more than 2000 people crammed into the *Hofbräuhaus*, a Munich beer hall, to hear this new voice. Through the force of his personality, his organisational abilities and his brilliant capability as an orator, Hitler quickly became the dominant figure in the party. He understood the power of the spoken word and knew how to arouse the emotions of his audience. The party changed its name to become the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, NSDAP), or Nazi Party.

Hitler the public speaker – an eyewitness account from 1923

I studied this slight pale man, his dark brown hair parted on one side and falling again and again over his sweating brow. Threatening and beseeching, with small pleading hands and flaming steel-blue eyes, he had the look of the fanatic. Presently my critical faculty was swept away ... I do not know how to describe the emotions that swept over me as I heard this man. When he spoke of the disgrace of Germany, I felt ready to spring on any enemy. I forgot everything but the man, then glancing around 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.

Kurt Lüdecke, *I Knew Hitler*, E Scriber's Sons, New York, 1937, p. 22.



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 2.3 Hitler's style as an orator was a result of practice. This is one of a series of photographs taken in the 1920s as Hitler worked on his techniques of movement and facial expression.

Questions

- 1 How useful would this source be for a historian studying Hitler's effect on people?
- 2 Explain what made the author of this extract so supportive of Hitler when he heard him speak.

By 1923, after having been in existence for only a few years, and in large measure through Hitler's drive and determination, the Nazi Party had over 70 000 members and was a significant political force in Bavarian politics. Included in the membership were the 15 000 members of the *Sturmabteilung* or SA.

The Storm-troopers (*Sturmabteilung*) or SA



SOURCE 2.4 Propaganda poster for the Storm-troopers or SA. The SA was an important element in helping Hitler to power. By 1934 they numbered over 4 million.

A feature of German political life in the 1920s and early 1930s was the activity of military groups that supported different political parties. Most of these groups were made up of men who had military experience in the First World War and many of them were in the earlier *Freikorps* formations that played a role in German political life in the early 1920s.

The Nazi movement was supported by the Storm-troopers (*Sturmabteilung*) or SA. With its extreme right-wing views and its opposition to both the Weimar Republic and communism, the Nazi Party attracted growing support from ex-*Freikorps* troops. SA membership grew rapidly and attracted men of all types, many of them no better than thugs and street bullies. In their distinctive brown uniforms, bought from surplus war stock in Austria, and their swastika armbands, they became the very visible face of the Nazi movement.

Their aim was to promote the party in rallies and parades and above all to protect the party leaders from their political opponents. It was to be the ‘battering-ram’ of the movement, and violent street battles between the SA and the supporters of other political groups became a feature of political life.

THE MUNICH BEER HALL PUTSCH, 1923

The southern German state of Bavaria, where the Nazi movement began, had always been a hotbed of political unrest and the German Government had lost a great deal of authority there. In November 1923, the Nazis attempted to seize control of the government of Bavaria by force and hoped that this would trigger a national revolution that would remove the government in Berlin.

The hastily planned *Putsch* took place on 8 November 1923 when heavily armed Storm-troopers encircled the *Bürgerbräukeller* and detained the leaders of the Bavarian Government who were attending a political meeting. Hitler announced that the Bavarian and national governments were deposed and that a new national government had been set up, led by him.

However, by the next morning, it was clear that the *Putsch* had failed. The Bavarian police were not prepared to back the *Putsch* as reinforcements entered the city. Hitler and his followers

realised that their attempt to seize power had failed. At the suggestion of General Ludendorff, the former commander of the First World War who was sympathetic to the right-wing views of the Nazis, the decision was made to stage a march into the centre of Munich. It was a desperate move, taken in the hope that this act of defiance might still win support.

The march ended in chaos when police, drawn up across a narrow street, opened fire on the marchers. Within a minute, 16 Nazi Storm-troopers and four police were dead.

A few months later in a Munich court Hitler and nine of his fellow conspirators, including Ludendorff, stood trial, charged with treason. Hitler used the trial as a forum to express his views, with German newspapers reporting the proceedings in detail. By the time the court verdict was delivered in April 1924, Hitler was no longer an unknown Bavarian politician, but a national figure. Ludendorff was pardoned, but Hitler was sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a court that largely agreed with him. He was eligible for parole after six months.

The importance of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch

Hitler learnt a number of all-important lessons from the failed *Putsch*: most importantly that power could not be achieved by force. From that day on, Hitler was committed to coming to power legally, according to the constitution. In 1933, 10 years after the failure in Munich, he did just that and was legally appointed Chancellor of Germany.

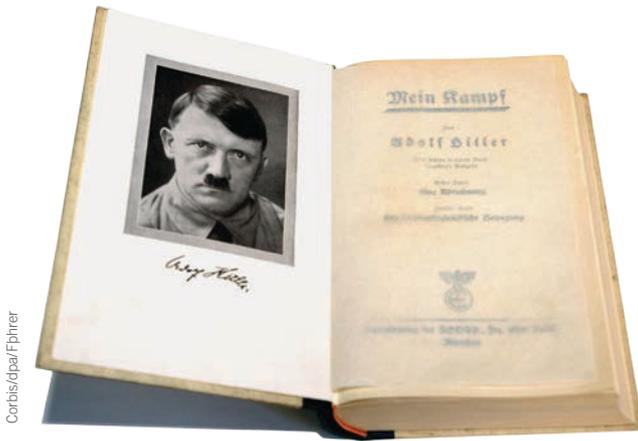
The events in Munich and the trial that followed also gave Hitler and his movement national publicity. He increased his following among right-wing nationalists and emerged as the obvious leader of the right-wing opponents of the Weimar Republic. The Munich *Putsch* also made it clear to Hitler that he could never hold power without the support of the German army, which had not been prepared to back his *Putsch* in 1923.

What was National Socialism?

During his time in prison Hitler started writing a book, *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). The bulk of the book outlines some of Hitler's political ideas, his views on race and Germany's future role in world affairs.

The British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper has observed that it is easy to criticise *Mein Kampf* because it is 'a horrible book ... filled with obscene hatred. It has no form, no style and the mind that it reveals is ugly and narrow'.³ But it is also an important book, because it reveals a great deal about Hitler's mind and outlook, and the ideas that formed the basis of National Socialism. Indeed, Hitler's main ideas did not change. What he wrote as his philosophy in 1924 he started to implement largely as policy when he became supreme ruler of Germany.

Hitler wanted to project himself as an original political thinker and National Socialism as a movement that had a systematic, developed ideology. In reality, neither was true. Hitler was not an original political thinker and most of his ideas were taken from a number of 19th century or early 20th century writers. But he was a politician who had a particular view of the world. This is usually called his 'world view' or *Weltanschauung* ('the way one sees the world'). In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler set down many of the beliefs that made up his world view.



Corbis/Alamy/Fbhrer

SOURCE 2.5 The first edition of Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*. The book, written while Hitler was in prison in 1924, outlined many of the policies the Nazi Party would carry out after it came to power in 1933.

wrote Hitler, 'was almost exclusively the product of the Aryan creative power . . . it was the Aryan alone who founded a superior type of humanity'. He also believed that civilisations decline and fall only when they fail to maintain the purity of their race. 'Whenever Aryans have mingled their blood with that of an inferior race,' he wrote, 'the result has been the downfall of the people who were the standard-bearers of a higher culture'. In Hitler's thinking, the Jews represented a threat to the purity of the Aryan race. To protect the German race, Hitler believed that the state must not only deal with inferior races, but also intervene in the lives of ordinary people and control what they are allowed to do. There is no freedom in Hitler's world. Marriage, for example, was only allowed between pure, healthy Germans. In Hitler's savage vision, the sick, the unhealthy and the weak would be banned from having children, in order not to infect the race.

NATIONALISM

At the heart of Hitler's world view was a deeply felt sense of nationalism. Hitler's idea of nation was closely linked to the idea of race. German-ness was not simply about the German country. Germany was the German *volk*, which included those that lived beyond Germany's borders. Hitler believed that Germany and the German people had lost their position of greatness and he was determined to restore this. Hitler spoke of a need for national revival, and to achieve this a revival of the national will was needed. In this sense the Nazi movement was ultra-nationalist. As part of this intense nationalism, the Nazis defined the targets for the German people to concentrate their hatred and fear upon. There were the Jews who threatened the racial purity of the German state, and there were the communists who sought to destroy the German state. Hitler and the Nazis gave many Germans what they wanted – someone to blame and someone to look to for salvation.

DEMOCRACY AND THE STATE

Nazism was a movement that was anti-liberal and anti-democratic. Hitler expressed his contempt for the idea of parliamentary democracy and the Weimar Republic. He wrote in *Mein Kampf* that Germans had been betrayed by the democracy imposed on them in 1918. Democratic ideas, personal freedom, the concept of equality and the rights of the individual played no part in

RACISM

Hitler had a racist view of world history, and the dominant theme running through *Mein Kampf* is his concept of race. The protection and expansion of the German race was the highest priority of the state. To Hitler, the Aryan (believed to be an earlier Indo-European race from which the existing Nordic peoples, including the Germans, were descended) was the master race (the *Herrenvolk*), and other races were inferior. The Aryan was the creative force in human history. 'Civilisation,'

Hitler's world view. The emphasis was on the nation, with the individual finding true fulfillment only by submitting to the will of the nation.

In place of democracy, Hitler believed in the will of a leader who could interpret the needs of the people. In his world view Germany needed a strong leader who would emerge unchallenged by the restraints of democracy and parliament, a leader who would lead the nation to its historic destiny and rule absolutely and without restraint, with the unquestioned loyalty of the nation. In Germany this concept became known as the 'leader principle' or *Führerprinzip*. The Nazis did not invent the term, but it came to represent the way the state would operate under Hitler.

ANTI-COMMUNISM

At the core of National Socialism was its opposition to communism and its message of class conflict. Communist Russia had become a reality in 1917 and Hitler saw in communism an international movement seeking to spread its influence throughout the world. A communist government was set up in neighbouring Hungary in 1919, and at the same time the communist-led Spartacist uprising had taken place in Berlin. Hitler was witness to a brief communist takeover in his own state of Bavaria, followed by violence on the streets of Munich, which left over 1000 dead.

Hitler also linked his hatred of communism with his hatred of the Jews. In Hitler's mind, Russia was the centre of a Jewish conspiracy, and although only a handful of the leaders of the Russian Revolution had a Jewish background, the Nazis presented the communist takeover of Russia in 1917 as a Jewish world conspiracy.

THE QUEST FOR LIVING SPACE (*LEBENSRAUM*)

In Hitler's vision, the Germans were destined to create a greater Germany, uniting all the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe to form a greater *Reich* or nation, populated by racially pure Germanic peoples. It was the destiny of the German people (the *Volk*) to create this great Germanic *Reich* that would dominate Europe. Hitler believed Germany had to acquire territory to assure the future survival of the German people, and this meant a deliberate policy of expansion into Eastern Europe, with the ultimate aim being the destruction of the Soviet Union. This vast heartland of Europe, which Germany would conquer 'by the power of a triumphant sword', was to be Germany's *Lebensraum* or living space. The master race would dominate, the inferior races (*Untermenschen*, or subhumans) would become slaves of Germans, and this vast *Reich* would last for a thousand years.

SOCIAL DARWINISM

A central theme of Hitler's thinking was also the idea of struggle. In the 19th century the naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–82) had explained how, in the world of nature, some species with favourable variations survived better than others when the environment changed. Darwin called this 'natural selection'.

Social Darwinism was a concept that emerged later in the 19th century. It suggested that what applied to nature could also apply to human society – that the strong prevail over the weak, and that superior races prevail over inferior races. This concept, with its theme of struggle and survival of the fittest, appealed to Hitler. 'The idea of struggle is as old as life itself,' said Hitler in 1928. 'Struggle is the father of all things ... He who wants to live must fight and who does not want to fight in this world where eternal struggle is the law of life has no right to exist.'⁴

Hitler's world view

Some elements of Hitler's world view that emerge from *Mein Kampf* are:

- + an intense German nationalism
- + that the fundamental role of the nation was to maintain the racial purity of the state
- + an absolute belief in the superiority of the Aryan race
- + that the Jews represented the greatest threat to the racial purity of the state and therefore the survival of the state
- + that a Jewish world conspiracy existed, and there was a link between this conspiracy and communism
- + that liberal parliamentary democracy had failed
- + that Germany had to revive her national will under a strong leader
- + that communism was a threat to Germany and had to be eliminated
- + that Germany's destiny was to expand into Eastern Europe, subjugating inferior races and acquiring its 'living space' or *Lebensraum*.

The Nazi Party comes to power

From 1924 to 1929 when the Weimar Republic enjoyed a period of economic growth and relative political stability, the Nazi Party operated at the fringe of German politics. It was a movement that thrived in conditions of hardship and disorder and the 'good times' rendered the Nazis less appealing or relevant. At the general elections of May 1928 over two-thirds of the voters backed the moderate democratic parties. The Social Democratic Party (SPD), which supported the republic and the democracy, won its largest vote since 1919, with 30 per cent of the vote and 153 *Reichstag* seats. The parties of the right did poorly, with the Nazis winning only 12 seats or 2.6 per cent of the vote. The turning point both for Germany and the fortunes of the Nazi movement was the onset of the Great Depression.

GERMANY AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1929

The German prosperity after 1924 was financed for the most part by borrowed money; between 1924 and 1929 this investment money was substantial, with 23 billion marks coming into Germany from the United States alone. The money was used to finance the industrial boom, to restructure German industry, to improve the German transport system and to finance social welfare projects such as housing. Some eight billion marks, directly from the foreign loans, were used to pay Germany's war reparations. The basic weakness of the German economy was that the country was using short-term loans to fund long-term projects.

In 1928, before the onset of the Depression, the German economy began to experience serious problems. There was a decline in the flow of foreign investment as money moved out of Europe and towards the booming New York stock market. Production slowed and unemployment began to rise. In the farmlands of Germany, agriculture remained depressed, as prices for agricultural products had been falling since 1925. The result was an increase in the level of agricultural

indebtedness and a decline in living standards for the rural population. With many who worked the land in debt, rural Germany became a source of support for Hitler and almost half of the Nazi votes in 1932 came from rural areas.

In October 1929 the New York stock market collapsed and the United States began its slide into economic depression. American banks recalled their short-term loans to Germany, and the Germany economy began to experience the full impact of economic collapse. The economic collapse after 1929 triggered unemployment, severe social hardship and political instability. Suddenly, the hard-won prosperity of the mid-1920s was gone, and it was in these conditions that the extremist parties like the Nazis and the communists prospered.

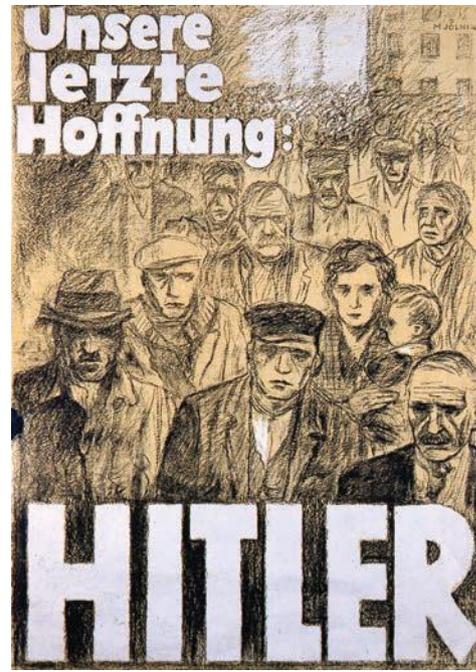
What made the Great Depression so hard for the German people was the suddenness of it all. Before 1929 Germans had enjoyed a brief period of economic prosperity. The standard of living in Germany was higher than in any other European nation, except Britain, and Germany was once again the most powerful industrial nation on the continent. Suddenly it all came to an end. The generation that had been forced to bear defeat and humiliation in 1919 was now forced to bear new burdens just a decade later. By 1932 the number of unemployed people had soared to more than six million, living standards had collapsed, and businesses and industry were at a standstill.

Had the Depression not been so severe or so prolonged, it is possible that the republic might have survived, but as the hardship deepened and as the unemployment neared 6 million, or over 30 per cent of the workforce, the failure of the system was assured. The Great Depression more than any other event tipped the scales against the survival of the Weimar Republic and German democracy. If the Weimar Republic had some chance of survival before 1929, it had very little chance afterwards. The Great Depression did not give the Nazis power, but since it transformed the party from a small group into a mass movement it made it possible for the Nazis to come to power.

The government had very few options available to deal with the crisis. It adopted a deflationary policy in which the government sought to cut its expenditure and balance its budget. This required cuts in welfare spending and increases in taxation. As a result of the deflationary policy, the impact of the Depression was even greater.

The social impact of the Depression was also severe and touched most classes in German society. The British historian Alan Bullock wrote of

“ men standing hopelessly on the street corners of every industrial town in Germany; of houses without food or warmth; of boys and girls leaving school without any chance of a job ... one may begin to guess something of the incalculable human anxiety and embitterment burnt into the minds of millions of ordinary German working men and women.⁵ ”



SOURCE 2.6 Nazi poster from 1933, 'Our last hope: Hitler'

Getty Images/Universal Images Group



SOURCE 2.7 German unemployment and the Nazi vote, 1922–32

Economic and social hardship of this scale generates political instability and this is what happened in Germany. The Weimar Republic, flawed and weak, had survived since 1919, but the impact of the Great Depression after 1929 was the final blow. The political, social and economic instability that came with the Depression was the trigger for a revitalisation of extreme movements and a major factor that carried the Nazis to power.



Bundesarchiv/Georg Pfahl

SOURCE 2.8 Unemployed men on the streets of Hamburg in northern Germany, 1931

POLITICAL TACTICS AND INTRIGUE 1930–33

Hitler did not seize power in January 1933, nor did he sweep to office at the head of some irresistible force. In the last analysis Hitler and the National Socialists were given power legally according to the constitution. Conditions in Germany after 1929, particularly the onset of the

Great Depression, had revived the fortunes of the Nazi movement, but in the end it was political intrigue, Nazi organisational and tactical skills, the exploitation of fears, the failure of other politicians to understand the real nature of the Nazi movement and in particular its opportunistic and **charismatic** leader that carried Hitler into office.

charismatic

With the capacity to inspire followers

Brüning and presidential rule

In March 1930 President von Hindenburg appointed Heinrich Brüning, the leader of the Centre Party, as the new chancellor, but Brüning's government did not have a majority in the *Reichstag*. This meant that the appointment of Brüning marked the end of democratic parliamentary government in Germany as it had operated since 1919. The president was prepared to support Brüning with the use of the presidential powers under Article 48, which gave the president the power to implement laws by decree. It was the start of **presidential rule**.

Brüning's response to the worsening economic situation was to follow a traditional policy of deflation. The government had to balance the budget by cutting expenditure on government spending and relief services, and increasing taxes. When the *Reichstag* voted to reject his budget in July, Brüning had the president intervene and, regardless of the elected parliament, the budget was implemented by decree under Article 48 of the constitution.

Despite the protest from the *Reichstag*, there was nothing illegal in what the chancellor did, but the use of Article 48 caused an extended political emergency. Authority was now taken away from the elected German Parliament and placed in the hands of the president.

Not surprisingly, the *Reichstag* responded by passing a vote of no confidence in the chancellor, which was carried 256 votes to 193. Criticised for using Article 48 and unable to govern with a majority, Brüning then asked the president to dissolve the *Reichstag* and call new elections for September 1930. At a time of serious economic crisis, it was almost certain that the extremist political parties, the enemies of democracy, would benefit. What had been a crisis for the parliament now became a crisis for the democracy.

presidential rule

The use of presidential powers to support a chancellor who did not have political support in the *Reichstag*

The 1930 elections

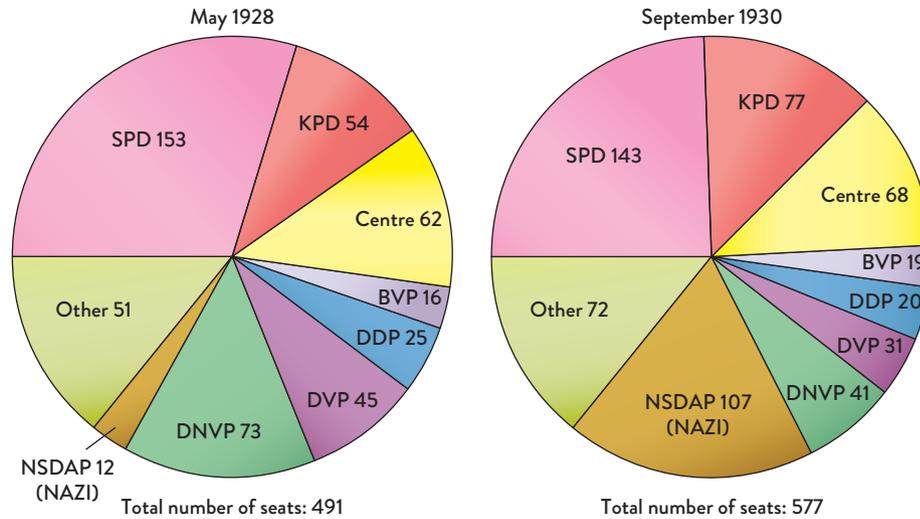
With the Depression deepening and more than three million people unemployed, the Nazi Party relished the opportunity that Brüning had provided with an election in September 1930. In a vigorous campaign it projected itself as the party of action. In hundreds of rallies and political meetings across the country, Hitler and the other Nazi leaders attacked the weakness and inefficiency of the parliamentary system, the divided political parties, the threat of communism, and the social and economic consequences of the Depression. The Nazis tapped into the mood of resentment and frustration at a system that had apparently failed, and they promised a revitalisation of the national will, which would allow Germany to regain its status in the European community. Hitler's simple message of recovery had a growing appeal to the disillusioned middle class, to small business operators and to the increasing numbers of the rural and farming population who suffered badly in the Depression. Hitler did not say how he would cure the problems of Germany, but he projected a determination and a conviction that he would. It was a tactic that won wide support. On the other side of the political spectrum, the communists also hammered the republic and attracted the votes of the unskilled workers and the unemployed.



SOURCE 2.9 Hitler campaigning in Munich during the *Reichstag* elections of 1930

Corbis/Underwood & Underwood

Comparison of Reichstag election results, 1928 and 1930 by seats



	May 1928 491 Reichstag seats	September 1930 577 Reichstag seats
Left-wing parties		
SPD	153 (29.8%)	143 (24.5%)
KPD	54 (10.6%)	77 (13.1%)
Catholic parties		
Centre Party	62 (12.0%)	68 (11.8%)
BVP	16 (3.0%)	19 (3.0%)
Middle-class parties		
DDP	25 (4.9%)	20 (3.8%)
DVP	45 (8.7%)	31 (4.5%)
DNVP	73 (14.2%)	41 (7.0%)
Right-wing party		
NSDAP Nazi Party	12 (2.8%)	107 (18.3%)
Other	51 (14%)	72 (14%)

SOURCE 2.10 Comparison of *Reichstag* election results, 1928 and 1930, by seats

Questions

- 1 Explain why Chancellor Brüning's coalition government (Centre, DDP and DVP) would still need to rely on presidential support after the 1930 elections.
- 2 Explain why both the Nazis and the KPD increased their vote in the 1930 election. Why did the Nazis perform better than the communists?
- 3 Which political parties are likely to have benefited from the decline in Nationalist and SPD vote?
- 4 Which political party probably benefited from the fall-off in the vote of the middle-class parties (the DDP and the DVP)? Can you explain why?
- 5 Was German democracy better off after the election of May 1928 or the election of September 1930?



COMING TO POWER, 1930–33

1930	14 SEPTEMBER	<i>Reichstag</i> elections; the Nazi Party gained six million votes and 107 seats, making it the second largest political party in the <i>Reichstag</i>
1931	MAY	Unemployment in Germany reached four million
1932	10 APRIL	Hindenburg re-elected president with 53% of the vote. Hitler gained 37% of the vote
	30 MAY	The fall of the Brüning Government
	1 JUNE	Franz von Papen became German Chancellor
	31 JULY	<i>Reichstag</i> elections; Nazi Party became the largest party in the <i>Reichstag</i> with 230 seats
	6 NOVEMBER	<i>Reichstag</i> elections; Nazi Party seats fell to 196
	17 NOVEMBER	The fall of the von Papen Government
	3 DECEMBER	General Kurt von Schleicher appointed Chancellor
1933	28 JANUARY	The fall of the von Schleicher Government
	30 JANUARY	President Hindenburg appointed Hitler Chancellor

The Nazis were very pleased with the election result in 1930. More than 35 million Germans voted and the Nazis increased their representation in the *Reichstag*, from 12 seats to 107 seats. This party of the extreme right was now the second largest party in the German Parliament. The German Communist Party (KPD), the party of the extreme left, won 77 seats, making it the third largest party in the *Reichstag*. The tragedy for Germany was that both of these political parties sought the overthrow of German democracy.

After the September 1930 elections the *Reichstag* was virtually unworkable, because the Nazis, the KPD and the German National People's Party (DNVP) were all opposed to Brüning and his frail coalition government.

Nevertheless, Brüning survived as chancellor because the SPD with their 143 seats were now prepared to support him in the *Reichstag*. For the socialists it was a difficult decision. They opposed Brüning's economic policies because of the great hardship these policies caused for the unemployed and the working class, but they were fearful of the consequences if the Brüning Government fell and the Nazis came to power.

Throughout 1931 Brüning persisted with his economic policies and used Article 48 to implement his economic measures. There were new tax increases and further cuts in wages and employment relief. Food prices rose and unemployment continued to climb, reaching 4.6 million in October 1931.

They came to end debate



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 2.11 Nazi deputies in their distinctive brown shirts (in the top half of the photo) take their seats in the German *Reichstag* after the election of 1930. They came not to debate, but to end debate.

We are entering the *Reichstag* in order that we may arm ourselves with the weapons of democracy from its own arsenal. We shall become *Reichstag* deputies in order that the Weimar ideology should itself help us to destroy it. If democracy is so stupid to reward us for this disservice with free fares and parliamentary pay, then that is its own business. We are content to use all legal means to revolutionise the present state of affairs ... We will march into the marble halls of parliament, bringing with us the revolutionary will of the broad masses from which we came, called by fate and forming fate. We do not want to join this pile of manure. We are coming to shovel it out ... We come as enemies. Like the wolf tearing into a flock of sheep, that is how we come!

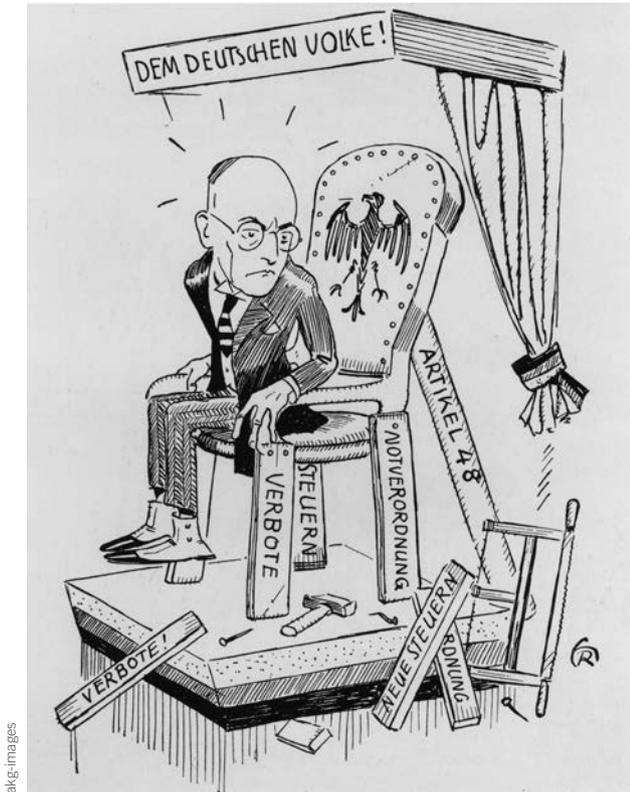
Joseph Goebbels in *Der Angriff* * 30 April 1928

* *Der Angriff* (*The Attack*) was a newspaper established by the Nazi Party in 1927.

Questions

- 1 Explain the main point Goebbels is making in this article.
- 2 If this publication was so hostile to democracy, explain why it was allowed to be published.
- 3 Is there any evidence in this extract that suggests the Nazis were seeking to keep their activities within the law?
- 4 How many came 'as enemies' after September 1930?

Dem Deutschen Volke



SOURCE 2.12 Cartoon from the magazine *Die Brennessel*, 7 October 1931

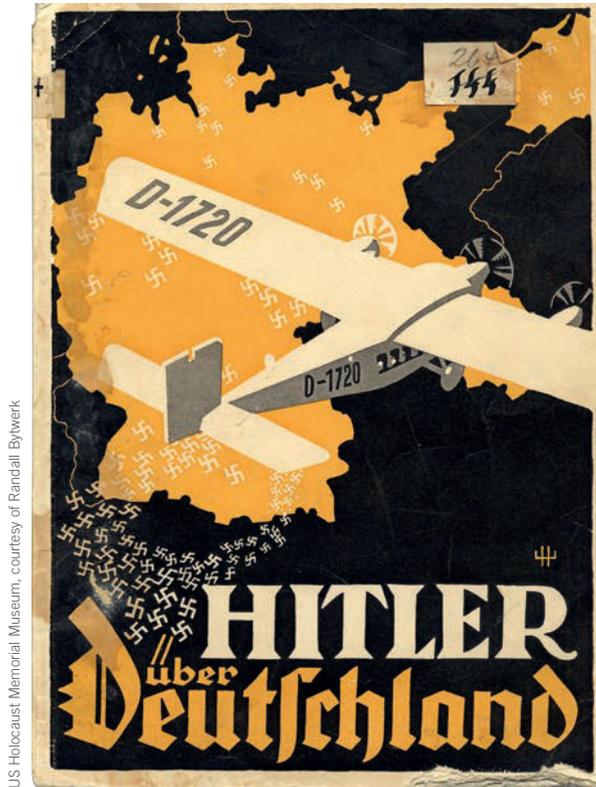
Questions

- 1 Identify the individual in this cartoon.
- 2 Look at the translation below of the German words used in the cartoon and explain the main point the cartoon is seeking to make:

+ <i>Dem Deutschen Volke</i> (the German people)	+ <i>Neue steuern</i> (new controls)
+ <i>Steuern</i> (control)	+ <i>Ordnung</i> (orders)
+ <i>Artikel 48</i> (Article 48)	+ <i>Verbote</i> (prohibition).
+ <i>Notverordnung</i> (emergency decree)	
- 3 How did the situation depicted in the cartoon come about?
- 4 Do you believe the cartoon's message is accurate or is it intended to convey something else?

Re-electing the president, 1932

In 1932 Hindenburg's seven-year term as president of Germany came to an end. Reluctantly, the elderly Hindenburg agreed to stand in the presidential elections in March, backed by the socialist and middle-class parties he privately despised. The Nationalists who would normally have supported Hindenburg ran their own candidate, Theodor Duesterberg; the Communist



US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Randall Bytwerk

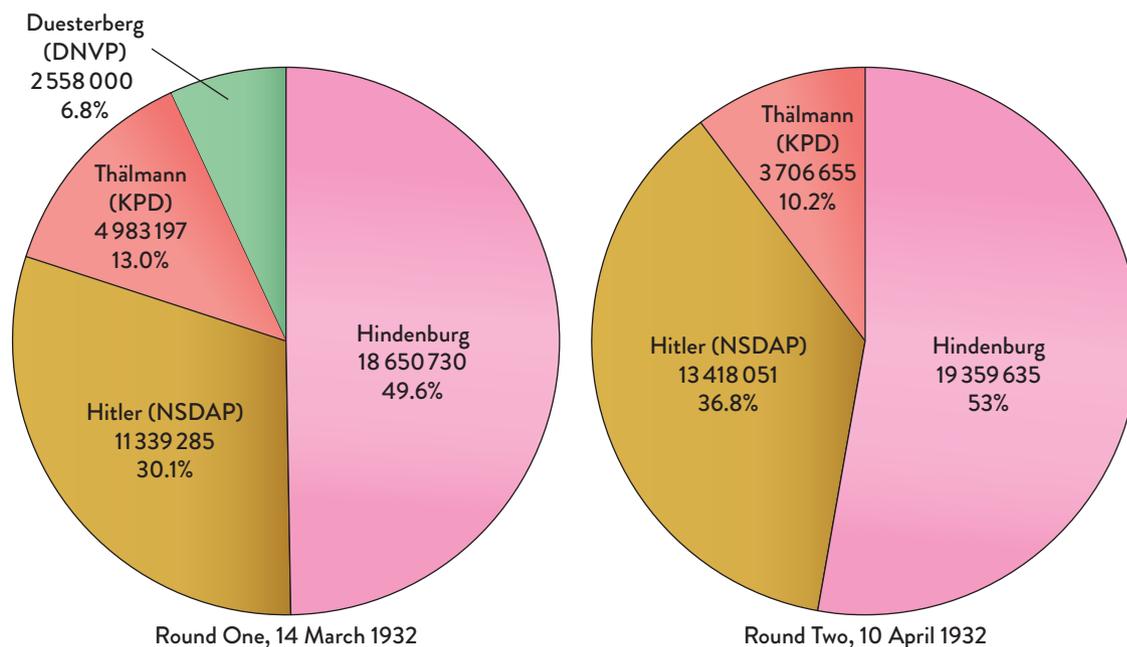
SOURCE 2.13 This cover image from a Nazi Party political pamphlet 'Hitler over Germany' depicts Hitler's 1932 election campaign for president.

Party leader Ernst Thälmann also stood for election; and, after some delay, Hitler announced his intention to run.

The Nazis conducted another vigorous election campaign, organising up to 30 meetings a day across the country. To meet his heavy round of speaking engagements, Hitler became the first modern politician to take to the air, speaking in as many as five cities in a day. Goebbels, who was in charge of Nazi propaganda, devised an appropriate slogan – 'Hitler over Germany'.

In the voting on 14 March no candidate received an absolute majority (more than 50 per cent); so a second round of voting was scheduled. The person with the lowest vote in the first round was excluded from the second round. The second round of voting on 10 April 1932 increased the Nazi vote, but not enough for victory. Hindenburg achieved 53 per cent of the vote and at 84 years of age was re-elected president of Germany for another seven years.

Voting in the presidential elections, 1932



SOURCE 2.14 Voting in the presidential elections, 1932

continued

continued

Questions

- 1 Explain why Hindenburg was unhappy that he was forced to a second round of voting.
- 2 Can you offer reasons why the KPD vote dropped in Round Two? Which of the candidates would probably have picked up some of the KPD votes?
- 3 Why is it probable that the bulk of Duesterberg's votes would have gone to Hitler in Round Two?

Kurt von Schleicher and the army in German politics

From the start of the Weimar Republic the army had preserved its influence and power within the nation. By the time of the Depression there was a growing belief within the army leadership that Germany needed a return to a stronger, more authoritarian government in order to deal with the increasing problems that confronted the nation. The old hostility to the democratic system gave way to a determination by a number of senior army officers to ensure the system was changed. The increased political activity of the army came from a growing concern at the breakdown of order and the economic and social impact of the Depression. Army officers were worried about the growth of the extremist parties of the left (the communists) and the right (the Nazis), and came to believe that Germany would once again find itself in a condition of revolutionary turmoil not unlike the period of 1918–19. If such a situation were to re-emerge, there was the possibility of civil war, which would force army involvement.

The leading military figure who actively engaged in political activity was General Kurt von Schleicher. He was a friend and adviser to the president and he enjoyed exercising political power and participating in political intrigue. Von Schleicher believed that the best interests of the nation and the German army were served by a strong government that had popular appeal and support in the *Reichstag*. What Schleicher and others close to the president saw from 1932 was the increasing electoral appeal of the Nazis and their growing numbers. Von Schleicher, in particular, was impressed by the Nazis' electoral success, by their right-wing views, by their opposition to communism, and by Hitler's stated goal that they sought power legally and within the system.

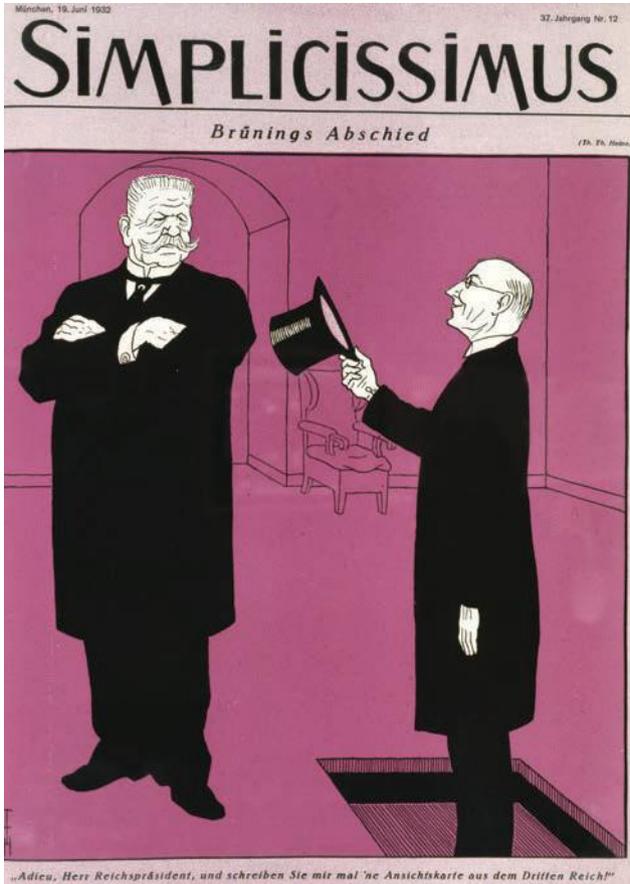
What these men failed to realise, however, or realised too late, was the potential danger and sheer determination of the Nazi movement. Like many other politicians, they underestimated Hitler. By 1932 Schleicher was looking for some way to bring the Nazis into government and control them. He wanted to tame Hitler and turn his movement from one that opposed the state to one that supported the state. He foolishly believed that once the Nazis had been given a share of power their extremism could be controlled.

Brüning betrayed, May 1932

Once Hindenburg was safely back as president after the 1932 presidential election, General von Schleicher began to have Brüning removed. Brüning had failed to remedy the economic problems and his government had become too dependent on the socialists (SPD) for support. Brüning was also opposed to any concessions to the Nazis, whereas Schleicher was forming the opinion that concessions were probably needed in order to win their support.

Working on the fears and uncertainties of the old president, Schleicher and others convinced Hindenburg that Brüning was no longer acceptable and that he had moved too far to the left. At the end of the month, in an act of great political betrayal, President Hindenburg asked Brüning for his resignation.

The dismissal of Brüning



bpk/Kunstabibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Knud Petersen

SOURCE 2.15 Cartoon from the magazine *Simplicissimus*, July 1932, 'And sometime Mr President write me a postcard from the Third Reich'

Questions

- 1 How long did Heinrich Brüning serve as chancellor?
- 2 Why did President von Hindenburg dismiss Brüning from office?
- 3 Explain the meaning of Brüning's comment in this cartoon of 1932.
- 4 Prepare a list of the main achievements of Brüning as German Chancellor.
- 5 To what extent could it be argued that Brüning's actions had assisted the rise to power of the Nazi Party?

Chancellor Franz von Papen

The fall of Brüning was another significant turning point in the failure of the German democratic system. Power no longer resided with the elected *Reichstag*, but with the elderly president and a **clique** of conservative politicians and military figures in his circle. These men now set up the next government, led by Franz von Papen, a former member of the Centre Party. Conservative, charming and wealthy, Papen had the support of Schleicher and Hindenburg, but few others. In the words of the French ambassador, he was 'taken seriously neither by his friends nor his enemies'.⁶ Von Schleicher privately observed that he was a hat without a head.

clique

A small, self-interested group of people

Von Papen's 10-man cabinet was called 'the Cabinet of Barons' because it was made up of right-wing industrialists and members of the Prussian nobility selected and approved by Schleicher. It had no political support in the *Reichstag*. Germany had a government that, in the words of the historian Alan Bullock, was

“

openly and unashamedly based upon the support of the president and the army.⁷

”

Reichstag elections, July 1932

To support Papen, Schleicher had renewed his contact with the Nazis and secured an understanding from Hitler that they would 'cooperate' with the new government if the ban on the SA and the SS imposed by Brüning in April 1932 was lifted, and if new elections were called. Von Papen agreed, the ban was lifted, the *Reichstag* was dissolved, and new elections were set for July. In this sense both Schleicher and Papen played into the hands of their political opponents, for as the Depression deepened, the Nazis relished the prospect of another election.

The election campaign of July 1932 was vigorous and violent. Street clashes between Nazi Storm-troopers and communists increased, with 86 people killed in street fighting during July. On 17 July, when the Nazis staged a provocative march through the working-class area of Hamburg, the inevitable violence left 19 dead and over 200 injured.

The Nazi Party was well prepared for the elections, and once again Hitler took to the air, visiting over 50 cities. He returned to his constant themes of the existing government's failure to remedy the economic distress, the unemployment (which then stood at 5.4 million) and the hardship that all classes of Germans were suffering. The election result was a staggering victory for the Nazis. They won 37.27 per cent of the vote and more than doubled their representation in the *Reichstag*, from 108 seats to 230 seats. In a free election 13.7 million Germans had voted for the Nazis. The Nazi Party was now the largest political party in the *Reichstag*. The Communist Party increased its representation to 89 seats and Papen was left with only 44 seats, mainly from the German National People's Party (DNVP) in a *Reichstag* of 608 seats.



Corbis/James Abbe



Corbis/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

SOURCE 2.16 Two men who enjoyed political intrigue and the exercise of power and whose rivalry and ambition helped put Hitler into power. Franz von Papen (1879–1969), left, was German Chancellor in 1932 and General Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934), right, followed him as chancellor for two months before Hitler's final victory in January 1933.

Hitler is refused power, August 1932

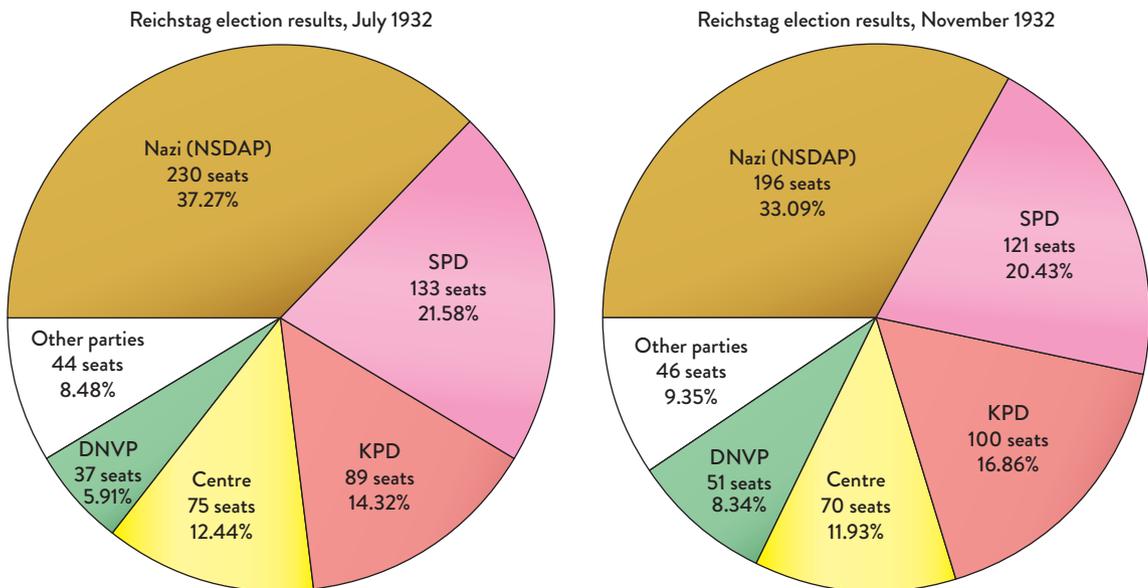
The election of July 1932 increased the Nazi strength and their demand for power. By legal means they had become the largest political party in parliament and Hitler now demanded the chancellorship and five cabinet places. The election was an overwhelming rejection of Papen and his so-called 'Cabinet of Barons', but Hindenburg refused to appoint Hitler as chancellor. Hitler was offered the position of vice-chancellor, which he rejected, demanding nothing less than the chancellorship.

When the *Reichstag* met in September 1932, Papen had no political support and the parliament carried a vote of no confidence in the von Papen Government, 512 votes to 42. The day after it assembled, the *Reichstag* was dissolved yet again by presidential decree and new elections were called for November. For the fourth time in eight months, the Germans were forced to a national election.

Reichstag elections, November 1932

The Nazis did not welcome yet another election. Party funds were almost exhausted and it was difficult to revive the momentum and commitment that had been a feature of the three earlier election campaigns that year.

Von Papen believed that the Nazis had reached their peak and that another election would see their strength decline; the results of the November 1932 election proved Papen right. The Nazi vote dropped from 37.4 per cent to 33.09 per cent. Their representation in the *Reichstag* fell from 230 to 196 seats, although they were still the largest party in the house. The other right-wing party, Hugenberg's German National People's Party (DNVP), increased their seats from 37 to 52, but the real winner was the Communist Party (KPD), which increased its representation from 89 to 100 seats.



SOURCE 2.17 Comparison of Reichstag election results, July and November 1932

'A house painter in Bismarck's chair'

Von Papen was encouraged by the election results and the fall in the Nazi vote, but he still had no political support in the *Reichstag*. Once again Hitler asked for the position of chancellor and once again Hindenburg refused. Privately he told his state secretary, Otto Meissner, that he 'couldn't put a house painter in Bismarck's chair'.⁸



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Von Schleicher had already decided that Papen had failed. He was worried about the failed economy as unemployment neared six million, he was concerned about the increasing strength of the communists and he disliked Papen's close friendship with the president. Von Schleicher was convinced that some arrangement had to be made with the Nazis.

In the same way that he had removed Brüning after the election of April 1932, Schleicher now attempted to remove Papen after the election of November. He persuaded the president that the army had lost confidence in Papen. Using the fear of civil war, he told the president that the army could not afford to take sides if civil war erupted. Hindenburg was always very sensitive to the interests of the German army. On 2 December he reluctantly asked Papen to offer his resignation, and, in a last effort to keep Hitler out of power, Hindenburg appointed Schleicher as the new chancellor.

Von Schleicher survived as chancellor for only two months. In a clumsy attempt to split the Nazis, Schleicher offered Gregor Strasser, the leader of the Nazis in the *Reichstag*, the position of vice-chancellor. Hitler responded with fury. Displaying decisive leadership, he forbade any deals with Schleicher and ordered that all Nazis in the *Reichstag* take an oath of loyalty to him personally. Strasser was accused of treason to the party and resigned. Eighteen months later both he and Schleicher paid for this with their lives when they were shot by the SS.

The final political deal, January 1933

At the end of 1932 there was a mood of doubt and despair in the Nazi Party. Despite its electoral success, the party was still not in power or even sharing power. Its electoral support appeared to have peaked, while the electoral support of the communists was growing. The party had financial problems, party membership was falling, and many party followers were losing faith that they would ever come to government. 'A great deal of griping and dissension,' Goebbels wrote in his diary. 'The year 1932 has been an interminable streak of bad luck ... all prospects and hopes have completely vanished.'⁹

When Papen ceased to be chancellor, Schleicher offered him a position as ambassador to France, hoping to get rid of him. Instead Papen stayed in Berlin and set to work to get rid of Schleicher.

Von Papen was motivated by his own wish to return to power and the satisfaction of removing the man who had removed him. There was only one way to achieve this. The Nazis had to become part of a government. Where Schleicher had failed, Papen intended to succeed and bring Hitler in and create a conservative, nationalist, anti-democratic government.

On 4 January 1933 Papen and Hitler met secretly in Cologne and a series of other secret meetings followed, which Hindenburg's son, Oskar von Hindenburg, and Hindenburg's close adviser, Otto Meissner attended. Von Papen's plan was to set up a coalition government of Nazis, the German National People's Party (DNVP) and his own conservative supporters. This government, unlike any government since 1930, would have a majority in the *Reichstag*.

The final difficulty was to convince the president, and considerable pressure was brought to bear on Hindenburg, including from the industrialists. Although the industrialists had little direct influence on Hindenburg, they too supported Papen's plans to take Hitler into partnership. In this sense they helped Hitler into power.

Hitler becomes Chancellor, January 1933

Of all the conservatives, President von Hindenburg proved the most resistant to the idea of allowing Hitler into government. Ironically, the 84-year-old Feld Marshal from another age, who had never supported the republic or the democracy, became its final guardian. Presidential rule since 1930 had not only destroyed the relationship between the elected government and the *Reichstag* but Hindenburg himself, his person and his office, was increasingly at the centre of public criticism – he was drawn into the dirt of everyday politics, which he abhorred. What finally moved the old president were the arrangements that Papen and the others had set up. Hitler would be appointed Chancellor and Papen Vice-Chancellor. Of the 11 Cabinet posts, only three would go to the Nazis.

Hindenburg was privately assured that, although Hitler was coming into government as chancellor, the real power would still rest with Papen and the other conservative members of the government. ‘No danger at all,’ Papen is said to have remarked. ‘We’ve hired him for our act.’¹⁰

On 28 January Hindenburg dismissed Schleicher as chancellor. ‘Whether what I am going to do now is right my dear Schleicher I don’t know,’ Hindenburg said. ‘I already have one foot in the grave and I am not sure that I shall not regret this action in heaven later on.’ Von Schleicher replied, ‘After this breach of confidence, Your Excellency, I would not be too sure that you will go to heaven.’¹¹

Two days later, on 30 January 1933, President von Hindenburg summoned Hitler to his office and in a brief ceremony appointed him Chancellor of Germany.

Hitler becomes Chancellor



alg-images/ulstein bild

SOURCE 2.18 Torchlight procession of SA troops from the Brandenburg Gate to the chancellor’s residence in Berlin during the night of 30 January 1933, following Hitler’s appointment as *Reich* Chancellor by President von Hindenburg

Question

- 1 Explain the historical context of this photo from 30 January 1933. In your response, include reference to the event itself, how it came about and the people and groups involved.

Hitler comes to power

Source A: Friedrich Meinecke, German historian remembers

When at midday on January 30 1933 the telephones everywhere in Greater Berlin carried the news that the Reich President had just signed Hitler's appointment as chancellor, I said to myself with the deepest consternation not only that a day of misfortune of the first order had dawned for Germany but also 'This was not necessary'.

Quoted in F Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1950, p. 63.

Source B: Alan Bullock, British historian, on Hitler's success

Despite the mass support he had won, Hitler came to office in 1933 as the result, not of any irresistible revolutionary or national movement sweeping him into power, nor even of a popular victory at the polls, but as part of a shoddy political deal with the 'Old Gang' whom he had been attacking for months. Hitler did not seize power; he was jobbed into office by backstairs intrigue. Far from being inevitable, Hitler's success owed much to luck and even more to the bad judgment of his political opponents and rivals ... As Hitler freely admitted afterwards, the Party's fortunes were at their lowest ebb when the unexpected intervention of Papen offered them a chance they could scarcely have foreseen.

Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Penguin Books, London, 1962, p. 253.

Source C: Ian Kershaw, British historian

Against all odds, Hitler's aggressive obstinacy – born out of lack of alternatives – had paid off. What he had been unable to achieve himself, his 'friends' in high places had achieved for him. The nobody of Vienna, 'unknown soldier', Beerhall demagogue, head of what was for years no more than a party on the lunatic fringe of politics ... had now been placed in charge of one of the leading states in Europe ... There was no inevitability about Hitler's accession to power. Hitler's rise from humble beginnings to 'seize' power by 'triumph of the will' was the stuff of Nazi legend. In fact, political miscalculation by those with regular access to the corridors of power rather than any actions on the part of the Nazi leader played a larger role in placing him in the Chancellor's seat.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allan Lane, London, 1998, p. 424.

Source D: AJP Taylor, British historian

The answer to the question how Hitler came to power is therefore to be found more in the actions of those German politicians who were not National Socialists than in those of Hitler himself. He waited, they decided.

AJP Taylor, *From the Boer War to the Cold War*, Penguin, London, 1996, p. 345.

Questions

- 1 Which of the accounts above is from a historian who actually witnessed the events?
- 2 What key point about Hitler's rise to power do all four historians agree on?
- 3 According to Alan Bullock (Source B) and AJP Taylor (Source D), which group was most responsible for Hitler's victory in 1933?
- 4 List the key points that Bullock and Kershaw (Source C) agree on in explaining Hitler's success.
- 5 To whom is Kershaw (Source C) referring when he writes of Hitler's 'friends' in high places?
- 6 Explain the main point AJP Taylor is making in Source D.

Who voted for the Nazis?

The middle class and the Nazis

In German society the middle class represented that large group below the traditional landed aristocracy and above the growing numbers of the German working class. Within the ranks of the middle class, there was a growing hostility to and fear of the influence of the working class and organised labour. The Depression deepened this class antagonism. Middle-class Germans had suffered a loss of income and they were suffering a loss of status. In 1913 a German teacher received ten times the wage of a coalminer. In the 1920s it was only twice the wage. After 1927 the Nazis began to focus their policies and propaganda to appeal to the interests and ideas of the German middle class.

The different groups that made up the middle class found different things in the Nazi message. Most were attracted by the aggressive line that the Nazis took against the left and particularly against the communists. They were worried about the social disorder and disintegration, and many were attracted by the Nazi promise of a return to order and traditional German values. They also approved of the Nazis' rejection of the Weimar system, their appeal to nationalism and their opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, and were attracted by the promises of economic action and change.

The Nazis and the young

In January 1933, when the party came to power, 70 per cent of the Nazi Party members were under 40 years of age, as were 60 per cent of the Nazi deputies in the *Reichstag*. The Nazi movement had a particular appeal to the young and it offered an outlet for their idealism and hope. The idea that the Nazis stood above class interests and looked only to the national good appealed to many Germans, particularly the young.

The Nazis and the working class

Until 1927 the Nazis had concentrated their efforts on winning support from the industrial working class in the large cities. In the mid-1920s this policy produced few results, as the working-class loyalty remained with the SPD or the KPD. However, after the onset of the Depression in 1929, the Nazis did begin to win a degree of working-class support. They won support in the urban centres where many workers who had previously supported either the middle-class parties or the SPD moved their support to the Nazis. In the large industrial regions like the Ruhr and the Rhineland, where trade unions were stronger, the Nazis made little headway and working-class support in the area still went to the SPD or the KPD. The Nazis promised the workers their 'right to work' and attacked the failure of the parties of the left to protect the interests of the working class. Once again the Nazis projected themselves as the party above class interests. In 1932 one in four German workers voted for the Nazi Party. A year later this figure had increased to one in three. Working-class support for the Nazis came mainly at the expense of the SPD, which saw its vote drop from 29.8 per cent in 1928 to 18.3 per cent in 1933.

continued

continued

The Nazis and rural Germany

The Nazis won a great deal of electoral support in the rural and farming communities. As early as 1928, the depressed rural areas of northern Germany were turning to the Nazis and the support spread to the smaller cities and towns across northern Germany. The Nazis were the only political party to offer hope to the long-suffering German farmers. German agriculture had been depressed from the mid-1920s with the steady decline in world commodity prices. The Nazis attacked the high interest rates and promised to subsidise farming. Nazi ideology preached the importance of the farming community as a vital part of the nation. Hitler believed that members of the farming community were racially the most pure because they were away from the corrupting influences of the great cities. When they came to power, the Nazis implemented policies to preserve the existence of the farming communities and the bond between what they called *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil).

The importance of region and religion

The Nazis won their strongest electoral support in the Protestant northern and central regions of Germany and particularly in the small towns and villages across the rural conservative states of Schleswig-Holstein, Pomerania, Hannover and East Prussia. The northern and central regions of Germany traditionally backed the middle-class parties such as the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the German People's Party (DVP). The evidence suggests that most of the Nazi gains were made at the expense of the parties such as the DDP and the DVP, which virtually disappeared, and smaller gains were made at the expense of the socialists (SPD). One of the great strengths of the Nazi Party was its ability to penetrate Germany's provincial cities and villages and capture the support of middle-class Germans. Support for the Nazis was never great in the industrial regions in western Germany and only marginally better in the big cities such as Berlin, Hamburg and Frankfurt.

Religion was the other important factor in determining who voted for the Nazis. In 1933, 63 per cent of Germans were Protestant and 33 per cent were Catholic. The support for the Nazis was mainly from Protestant voters in the north. Catholic voters, mainly in the southern states, were the most resistant to the Nazis, supporting the Catholic Centre Party and the Bavarian People's Party instead.

Questions

- 1 Draw a mindmap or similar diagram that summarises the discussion, 'Who voted for the Nazis?'. Your diagram can be on paper or a suitable digital format. Your diagram should include the different attitudes of social groups in German society that supported Nazism and note the issues that encouraged their support for the Party.
- 2 Nazism is sometimes described by historians as attempting to be 'all things to all people'. Is this a reasonable assessment of the party's political appeal? What challenges or contradictions might this strategy for gaining support have had for the Nazi Party once it had attained political power?

Why did the Nazis come to power?

There are many serious historians who believe it was quite possible, had historical events been different, that even in 1933 the Nazis could have failed to achieve their goal. Just as the fall of the Weimar Republic was not the result of one cause but a combination of causes, so too there were many factors at work when one seeks to explain the Nazi success.

To understand why it happened, two key questions need to be considered:

- 1 Why were the Nazis able to gain such a mass following that they became the largest political party in Germany?
- 2 Having won this mass support, what events or circumstances gave Hitler power?

THE APPEAL OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

One reason for the success of the Nazis was that they developed a broad appeal across many groups in German society and never claimed to represent only one class. The Nazis did not have a rigid or defined ideology and it was the vagueness of the party program that worked in their favour. Nazism was in reality a very negative movement. It developed out of all that was wrong with post-war Germany.

As the Nazis railed against weak democratic governments, economic chaos, the defeat of 1918 and the humiliation of Germany, the threat of communism, and the loss of German vitality and will, it became a movement in which most groups in German society could find some element of appeal.

The movement also displayed great skill in playing on a variety of emotions and appealing to particular groups. Many people in rural Germany supported the Nazis because of the promise of agrarian reform. To the unemployed there was the promise of relief. To the army there was the promise of rearmament. Industrialists and business interests saw the Nazis as the only group that actively opposed the communists. Young people were attracted by the idealism of the movement and the hope of a better Germany. Nationalists supported the Nazi pledge to restore German honour and greatness. The middle class, which had suffered through inflation and Depression, saw the Nazis as promoting middle-class values and returning stability, order and security.

NAZI TACTICS

The Nazis did not create the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic, but more than any other group they exploited these weaknesses to their advantage. They were not responsible for the Weimar political system or the Treaty of Versailles, but they were able to play upon the prejudices and fears of Germans, the international humiliation, the hatred of the Treaty of Versailles and the failure of the political system. They did not cause the Great Depression, but they exploited the economic hardship of the Depression with an aggressive and sustained attack on the democratic system. There were many groups in German society that were opposed to the democratic system, but in the end it was the Nazis with their organisational and tactical skill that gave them the advantage.

They kept to their strategy, developed after the failed Munich *Putsch* of 1923, to come to power legally. For a movement that ultimately proved so criminal, 'legality' was important.

The path to success required efficient planning and organisation. In the years after 1924 the party developed an effective structure: the country was divided into 34 districts or *Gaue*, with each *Gau* being the responsibility of a party official, who was called a *Gauleiter*, or district leader. Party branches were opened in small villages and major cities, and special party organisations were set up for the young. The Nazis maintained a very clever and sustained propaganda battery against the republic. ‘We will not rest,’ said Goebbels, ‘until they give us the power’. Every mistake and weakness of the democracy was exploited. SA troops and party members promoted social welfare projects for the underprivileged, the old and the unemployed, reinforcing the party’s message of creating a national community of all Germans. Rallies, parades and political meetings promoted the party and its message. The Nazis placed great importance on display in the form of party rallies and parades, as a tactical way of promoting the image of the party as a strong and united force for national revival.



Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo

SOURCE 2.19 Storm-troopers bagging potatoes donated by German farmers for distribution to the unemployed

THE ROLE OF ADOLF HITLER

Any explanation of the success of the Nazis must take into account the central role of Adolf Hitler. The German historian Karl Dietrich Bracher saw Hitler as a fanatic, a man obsessed who rose to power through his unshakable determination and the weakness and miscalculation of his political opponents. He suggests that Nazism could be more accurately explained as Hitlerism. James Joll, a British historian, called Hitler

“ This baffling figure – so intelligent and so commonplace, so terrifyingly mad in his long term goals and basic assumptions, so astute and skillful in his diplomacy and politics.¹² ”

It is difficult to believe that the Nazis would have come to power without Hitler. The force of his personality drove the movement and he sought power with a ruthless will and determination. He had an absolute belief in himself as a man destined by fate to lead the German people. Apart from his outstanding capacity as an orator and his ability to move the masses, he was a clever and calculating politician who was constantly underestimated by his opponents. He was a master of tactics and an opportunist who took full advantage of the weakness of his enemies.

THE DIVISION OF THE LEFT

The victory of the Nazis was made easier by the divisions among the political parties of the left. A long hostility had existed between the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The communists could never forgive the Social Democrats for ordering the suppression of the Spartacists in 1919. In fact, the SPD had lost its revolutionary goals. Although it remained the largest political party in the *Reichstag* until 1932, and was one of the few political parties that consistently supported the republic, it was able to form only one government in the decade from 1923 to 1933.

By the 1920s the German Communist Party, the largest outside the Soviet Union, was firmly influenced by Moscow. It followed the line that the real enemy of the German working class was not the extreme right (the Nazis), but rather the Social Democrats, whom it called ‘social fascists’.

By confronting each other and failing to close ranks against the growing menace of Nazism, the left of German politics must carry some share of the blame for Hitler’s success.

THE WEAKNESSES OF HITLER’S OPPONENTS

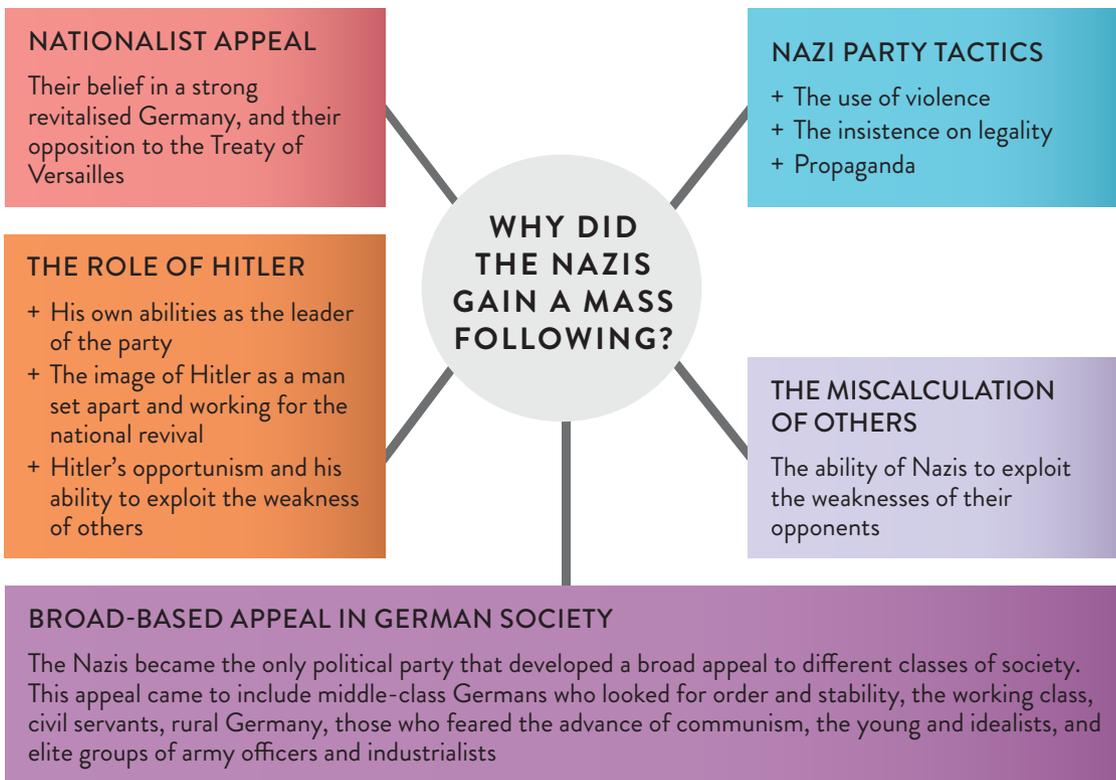
It is easy to overlook the fact that the majority of the German electorate never supported the Nazis. At its peak in July 1932 the Nazi Party received 37.4 per cent of the vote, and in the election that followed in November its voting strength declined. Although the electoral support made the Nazis the largest party in the *Reichstag* after 1932, it never held a majority of the seats.

In the end the Nazis were given power in January 1933 by the deliberate action of the conservative elite groups who were Hitler’s opponents. These conservative elites, which included the *Junker* landed aristocracy, the army leadership, some of the key industrialists, and conservative politicians such as Papen and Schleicher, seriously underestimated both Hitler and his movement. The conservatives had never supported the concept of parliamentary democracy and they sought to use the strength and appeal of Hitler’s movement to entrench their own authority and power. They took a chance on Hitler and they lost, but in the gamble they handed him power. They neither wanted nor expected the triumph of Nazism, but their weakness and miscalculation contributed to Hitler’s success. It is highly unlikely that the Nazis would have gained office without their support.

There was nothing inevitable about Hitler’s rise to power; indeed, it could well have been avoided. The Nazis themselves were losing support in late 1932 and Nazi leaders like Goebbels believed that the movement had reached its peak. The economy was showing signs of recovery, the threat from the communists, despite the deliberate exaggeration of the Nazis, was never great, and the loyalty of the army was never in question. If the army had been called upon to support the government, it would have supported Hindenburg and not Hitler. Yet at this very moment Hitler was summoned by his opponents and given the chancellorship. The weakness of these opponents was a key factor in Hitler’s rise. One German historian who lived through the events offers a personal insight. Friedrich Meinecke knew the men involved and refers to the element of luck in the rise of the Nazis. He wrote:

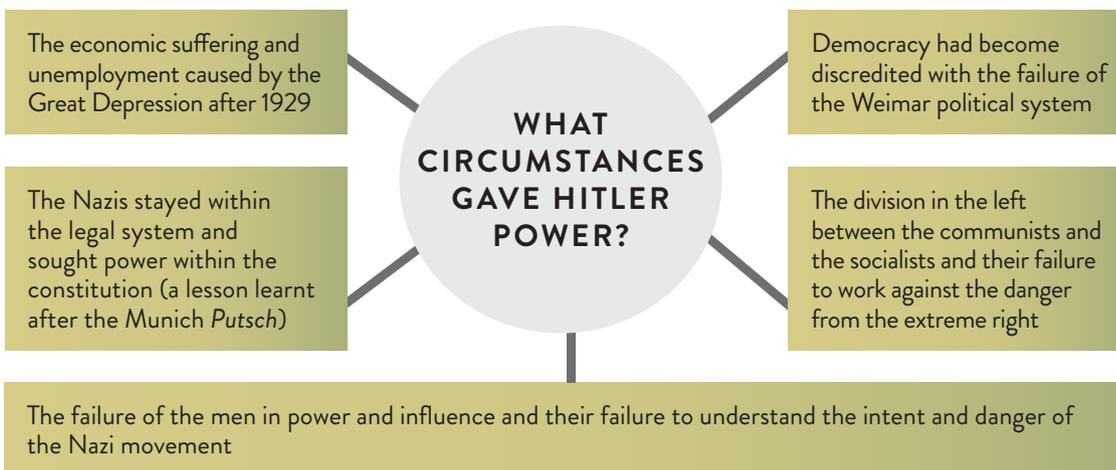
“ Did not chance weave its threads into the fabric... [It] is impossible to pass over in silence the question whether the demon chance did not come to the aid of the daring gambler and big swindler Hitler in his rise to power and in his final call to the office of chancellor ... chance plays a role in history, a much greater role than the philosophers of history imagine’.¹³ ”

Meinecke called it chance; Hitler believed it was providence (the will of God).



“ Many Germans turned to the Nazis and selected from their policies what appealed to them. The Nazi movement was accepted by many because it seemed to provide the answer to personal and national frustration. The emotionalism and indeed the irrationalism of the movement had strong appeal to those who were disillusioned by the decay of German society... the only solution was to be found in a strong leader... Appeal in particular was strong to the classes that saw their privileges threatened, ex-servicemen who had not been integrated into civilian life, to young who saw little opportunity before them, and to the middle class whose emotions Hitler could exploit with all the skill of the master agitator. ”

Adapted from G Greenwood, *The Modern World*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1964, p. 516



SOURCE 2.20 Why the Nazis came to power

SONDERWEG (A SPECIAL PATH)

Even before the final destruction of Nazism in 1945 historians had begun the quest to explain why it was possible that such a civilised and cultured nation as Germany should have experienced such a dark episode in its history. Why did Germany, unlike other Western industrial nations, end up with Hitler?

In the post-war era some historians came to explain Hitler as something almost inevitable or predetermined for Germany. They argued that, unlike other Western European countries, there were features in Germany's past that made a movement like the Nazi movement possible. These features included the fact that Germany became a unified nation state later than most and that, unlike Britain, France and the United States, it never developed a strong democratic tradition and a true expression of liberalism or freedom. The ruling elite kept power and influence, and when democracy was imposed on the Germans in 1919, it was established amid the unfavourable conditions of defeat and disorder. This helps to explain why in Weimar Germany so many were hostile to the republic. There was also a long authoritarian tradition of Germany having a strong leader and that Germans had been conditioned in their past by a school of thought and philosophy from German writers and philosophers like Hegel and the historian Treitschke who glorified the nation more than the individual. In effect, these historians suggested that Germany developed differently, following a 'special path' (*Sonderweg*), and given this difference, a movement like Nazism was the end result.

Conclusion

There are many factors at work that must be part of any explanation for why the Nazi Party came to power in January 1933. In part, the Nazis succeeded because the Weimar Republic failed to solve the economic problems and to establish a functional system of government. The shortcomings and failure of the Weimar Republic is part of the explanation, but by no means the complete explanation.

The role of the Great Depression is central to the Nazi success for, without it, Hitler's movement would never have become a mass movement with a serious claim to power. The electoral success of the Nazis is linked to their increasing appeal, to their ability to offer something for most sections of German society and to their unrelenting tactics and determination. There was the role of Hitler himself, his belief in himself, his capacity as an orator and his charismatic appeal. He was the opportunist who was constantly underestimated by his opponents and finally it was these opponents who gave in and handed him the power.

By 1930 the Weimar Republic was probably doomed, but there was no certainty that the Nazis would replace it. The British historian Ian Kershaw in his biography of Hitler (1998) argued that there was nothing inevitable about Hitler's accession to power. In his monumental study, Kershaw explores how so many Germans underestimated Hitler. The democratic system was failing and powerful groups were seeking to bring it down. Fearful of communism, the right-wing elites, the army leadership, the conservatives, big business, and the agrarian landowners, gave Hitler the final opportunity for power that they could so easily have denied him. Hitler came to power through the miscalculation of others. Kershaw suggests that the anxiety of these groups to destroy democracy rather than the keenness to bring the Nazis to power was what triggered the complex developments that led to Hitler's chancellorship.



Chapter summary

- + In 1919 Hitler joined a small political group in Munich called the German Workers' Party. He soon became leader of this group and transformed it into the National Socialist German Workers' Party or Nazis.
- + The Nazis quickly gained an identity and grew in size as Hitler not only shaped the party, but also emerged as its most prominent figure.
- + In November 1923 the party suffered a major setback in the failed Munich Beer Hall *Putsch*, an attempt to seize power in Bavaria.
- + Briefly imprisoned for his part in the putsch, Hitler took the opportunity to write *Mein Kampf*, which defined many of the aims of the Nazi Party.
- + Between 1924 and 1929, as Germany experienced a period of economic and political stability, the Nazi Party failed to make progress.
- + The start of the Great Depression and the severe economic hardship and unemployment gave the Nazis a new opportunity.
- + In the elections of 1930, the Nazis increased their representation in the *Reichstag* from 12 to 107 seats.
- + In May 1932 the Brüning Government fell and Franz von Papen became Chancellor.
- + New elections in July 1932 increased the Nazi vote to give them 230 seats in the *Reichstag*, making them the largest party in the German parliament.
- + Papen governed with the use of Article 48 and the support of the president.
- + Papen was dismissed in December 1932 and General Kurt von Schleicher was appointed Chancellor.
- + Schleicher tried to split the Nazis by offering the position of Vice-Chancellor to Gregor Strasser, the leader of the Nazis in the *Reichstag*. The attempt failed.
- + Papen and other conservatives set in motion a plan to bring the Nazis and German National People's Party (DNVP) into government, with themselves as part of a coalition. They believed they could control Hitler.
- + Hindenburg was finally persuaded to overcome his opposition to Hitler and on 30 January 1933 he legally appointed him Chancellor of Germany.

Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/germany>.

Further resources

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- 3 Trevor-Roper, H, *The Listener*, January 1973.
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- 5 Bullock, Alan, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Penguin, London, 1962, p. 152
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- 9 Goebbels, J, *My Part in Germany's Fight*, Hurst & Blackett, London, 1938, p. 215.
- 10 von Papen, F, *Memoirs*, André Deutsch, London, 1952, p. 217.
- 11 Quoted in J Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1973, p. 363.
- 12 Joll, J, *International Affairs*, July 1964, p. 489.
- 13 Meinecke, F, *The German Catastrophe*, Cambridge, Mass, 1950, p. 61.



Chapter review activities

- 1 Identify and explain five of the main points Hitler made in his book *Mein Kampf*.
- 2 In two paragraphs explain why the failed Munich Beer Hall *Putsch* of 1923 was an important turning point in the history of the Nazi Party.
- 3 Place these five points in the order you feel reflects their importance in explaining the rise of Hitler and his movement. Write a paragraph on each to explain how they contributed to the success of the Nazis:
 - a Treaty of Versailles
 - b Great Depression
 - c weakness of the Weimar Republic
 - d role of Hitler
 - e weakness of others.
- 4 In an extended paragraph, explain what happened in January 1933 before Hitler was offered the position of Chancellor of Germany.
- 5 It is wrong to talk about a Nazi seizure of power. Hitler did not seize power; he was given it by men who despised him.
 - a Identify the men who despised Hitler.

- b Put yourself in the position of any two of these men and write a diary entry these individuals may have written about Hitler at the time.

6 Reichstag election results 1928–32:

	1928	1930	July 1932	Nov. 1932
Left-wing parties				
SPD	153 (29.8%)	143 (24.5%)	133 (21.5%)	121 (20.4%)
KPD	54 (10.6%)	77 (13.1%)	89 (14.3%)	100 (16.8%)
Catholic parties				
Centre Party	62 (12.0%)	68 (11.8%)	75 (12.4%)	70 (11.9%)
BVP	16 (3.0%)	19 (3.0%)	22 (3.2%)	20 (3.1%)
Middle-class parties				
DDP	25 (4.9%)	20 (3.8%)	4 (1.0%)	2 (1.0%)
DVP	45 (8.7%)	31 (4.5%)	7 (1.2%)	11 (1.9%)
DNVP	73 (14.2%)	41 (7.0%)	37 (5.9%)	51 (8.3%)
Right-wing party				
Nazi Party	12 (2.8%)	107 (18.3%)	230 (37.2%)	196 (33%)

- a Which two political parties maintained a fairly consistent level of political support from 1928 to 1932? Can you explain why?
- b Which political parties lost support? Do the statistics give any indication as to where this support may have gone?
- c Do these statistics support the view of many historians that the Nazis attracted support not only from the German middle class, but also from the German working class?
- d Do these figures suggest religion played a role in determining who voted for the Nazi Party?

Essay questions

- 7 Explain how and why the German democratic system collapsed in the years from 1929 to 1933.
- 8 ‘There was nothing inevitable about Hitler’s political victory in 1933. To the very end his political opponents could have kept him from power.’ Do you agree with this observation? Why/Why not?
- 9 ‘What caused the fall of the Weimar Republic and what caused the victory of Nazism are two different questions that require two different and only partly related answers.’ To what extent can this statement be justified?



CHAPTER THREE



The totalitarian state

The men who made Hitler chancellor in January 1933 expected that real power would remain with President von Hindenburg and with the vice-chancellor, Franz von Papen and his conservative colleagues. But Hitler's political opponents had completely underestimated Hitler and the Nazi movement. Having brought the Nazis into government, Hitler's opponents proved incapable of controlling the Nazi revolution that now engulfed them and Germany.

Hitler despised democracy and had made no secret of his contempt for the democratic parties. Hitler's concept of leadership was to rule unrestricted by the *Reichstag* or any other political group. Having been given power, he now sought total power. He intended to establish a totalitarian state in which the Nazi Party would be the sole political force in Germany. What is remarkable is that within a mere two months of his appointment as chancellor he had, in large measure, achieved this aim, moving from the role of legal chancellor to that of legal dictator.

◀ The entrance to Hamburg Railway Station, 1941

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What is a totalitarian state?
- + How did the Nazis establish a totalitarian state?
- + How did the Nazis use terror and repression from 1933?

The path to dictatorship, 1933–34

In the 10-year struggle for power from 1923 to 1933, Hitler had placed special emphasis on the need for legality and, until the Nazis were secure in power by 1934, it was important to preserve the appearance of legality. After he was in power, however, Hitler set about establishing his absolute personal rule. His tactic was to use the constitution to alter the constitution. This process of securing legal political power was accompanied by the ‘coordination’ or bringing into line of the other social and cultural institutions within Germany.

TOTALITARIANISM

The word ‘totalitarian’ first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1933 and was used to define a particular type of government that came to power in a number of European countries after the First World War. The Soviet Union under Stalin and Germany under Hitler are the classic examples of the totalitarian state. Totalitarianism, as a form of dictatorship, is a useful way of understanding the system of rule established by the Nazi Party in Germany during the Third Reich.

To understand the term, one must focus on the key word ‘total’. Totalitarianism is a system of government in which power and all aspects of state affairs are in the hands of one party, and that party tolerates no opposition. There is total control over all aspects of life. There is no provision for debate or criticism. Earlier in history there were many forms of government that were despotic, with absolute rulers or kings who ruled by ‘divine right’. Totalitarianism, however, is something more than despotism.

These earlier types of absolutist rulers imposed their will from above, but they did not seek to change or reshape society. A key feature of totalitarianism is that it seeks to shape the way society thinks and acts. It seeks to impose the will and philosophy of the party in power and uses modern science and technology to be all-pervasive and to influence every aspect of daily life. It is also different from earlier forms of despotism or absolutism in that it is a movement that is usually based on some element of popular support.

Totalitarianism and political religion

Given the examples of Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s Russia and the long struggle of the Cold War after 1945, totalitarianism has been a subject for considerable study by historians and political scientists. In 1956 two political scientists, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, defined the characteristic features of the totalitarian state:

- + a single mass party, usually led by a charismatic leader
- + an official ideology
- + total control over the economy
- + control over mass communications
- + a system of terror and police control
- + control over the armed forces of the state.

continued

continued

TABLE 3.1 Democracy v totalitarianism

Democracy v totalitarianism	Weimar Germany 	Nazi Germany 
	1919–33	1933–45
A constitution	Yes	Suspended
Open, regular and free elections	Yes	No
Ability of all citizens to participate in government	Yes	No
Ability to change the government	Yes	No
Protection for all citizens	Yes	No
Freedom of speech	Yes	No
Freedom of assembly	Yes	No
Freedom of religion	Yes	Restricted
Freedom of the press	Yes	No
Freedom from arbitrary arrest	Yes	No
An independent judiciary	Yes	No

Totalitarianism, as it operated in Hitler's Germany, could also be understood as a type of political religion that emerged in the 1930s. 'What else is Hitlerism unless it is these two credos (beliefs),' wrote the Austrian Franz Borkenau in 1940, 'first, that the Germans are God's Chosen People, by nature superior to all other people, predestined to rule the world and bring salvation to it; and secondly, that Hitler is the chosen prophet of the chosen people?'¹



akg-images/ulstein bild

SOURCE 3.1 With all the solemnity of a religious occasion, the Nazis held a yearly ceremony to honour the memory of the 1923 Munich Beer Hall *Putsch*. The so-called 'blood flag' used in the *Putsch* was treated as a sacred relic. In other ceremonies Hitler joined the blood flag to new Nazi banners, signifying a type of mystical transmission of the spirit of the party.

In more recent times, historians have returned to this debate, in particular the British historian Michael Burleigh. In his book *The Third Reich – A New History* (2001), Burleigh argues that in Nazi Germany totalitarianism took the form of a political religion. As a political religion, Nazism sought to influence every aspect of life in Germany after 1933 and, for millions of Germans, Nazism assumed a religious appeal, with a leader seen by millions as a new saviour, leading the German people to this new destiny. Hitler himself often referred to God or Providence as having guided his path. ‘That is the miracle of our age,’ he said in 1936, ‘that you have found me, and that you found me among so many millions! And that I found you, that is Germany’s good fortune.’²

Like a religion, the movement had its founder, its symbols, its rites, relics and rituals, its days of special celebration, its beliefs defined in the pages of *Mein Kampf*, even its martyrs to the cause; for example, the dead from the 1923 Munich *Putsch*, or the SA figure Horst Wessel who became, in death, the Nazi’s martyr-in-chief. Nazism offered the promise not of an afterlife but a better life through obedience, sacrifice and faith in the political system.

If Nazism was a form of political religion what can this say about the moral and ethical values of a society, and the choices many individual Germans made? In the view of Michael Burleigh, this led to a society in which, ‘masses of ordinary people chose to abdicate their individual critical faculties in favour of politics based on faith, hope, hatred and sentimental self-regard for their own race and nation’.³ Great crimes were committed, including genocide, as one of the most advanced nations in Europe descended into a new barbarism under the banner of this new faith.



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NAZI DICTATORSHIP

1933	30 JANUARY	Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in a coalition with the German National Party and other conservative politicians
	FEBRUARY	First concentration camps were established for political opponents
	27 FEBRUARY	The <i>Reichstag</i> fire
	28 FEBRUARY	Presidential decree <i>For the Protection of People and State</i> suspended basic political rights and freedoms of the German people
	5 MARCH	<i>Reichstag</i> elections – Nazi Party won 43.9% of the vote
	23 MARCH	The Enabling Act (<i>Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and the State</i>) passed. The Act enabled the Nazi Government to make laws without the approval of the <i>Reichstag</i>
	2 MAY	The trade union movement was abolished and the German Labour Front was established in its place
1934	14 JULY	<i>Law Against the Establishment of New Parties</i> was issued. The Nazi Party became the only legal political party in Germany
	12 NOVEMBER	<i>Reichstag</i> elections; the Nazi Party won every seat in the <i>Reichstag</i>
	30 JUNE	Night of the Long Knives; SA was neutralised and other political opponents eliminated
	2 AUGUST	Death of President Paul von Hindenburg Position of President and Chancellor combined German armed forces swore a personal oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler

THE LEGAL DICTATOR

The first step in this final phase of securing absolute power came when, at the first cabinet meeting of the new government, Hitler demanded new elections, which were set for March 1933. The Nazis spoke of bridging the divisions within German society and the creation of a new sense of unity and community among the German people.

Despite Hitler's appeal to national revival and the tactic of working within the legal framework of the state, the reality was that from the start, the Nazis used force and intimidation. 'The first condition of power,' Hitler wrote, 'lies in the constant and uniform application of force'.⁴ In the election campaign that followed, the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) or Storm-troopers were given a free hand. The main targets for Nazi violence were the communists and the socialists, but it was also a time for settling old scores.

This use of force was made easier because Hermann Göring, one of the three Nazis in the Cabinet, was appointed Prussian Minister for the Interior and he controlled the 90 000-strong Prussian police force. In February police numbers were increased with the appointment of 50 000 'auxiliary police', drawn mainly from the ranks of the SA and the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), initially Hitler's personal bodyguards. Göring made it very clear what he wanted of his police. 'It is not my business to do justice,' he told them, 'it is my business to annihilate and exterminate – that's all'.⁵ Another organisation that rapidly began to expand from early 1933 was the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, the secret state police or *Gestapo*. Arrests began, and the SA opened the first concentration camps for political opponents at Dachau outside Munich and at Oranienburg outside Berlin.



Bundesarchiv/Georg Pahl

SOURCE 3.2 An officer of the Prussian police force and a member of the SA patrol a Berlin street, March 1933. Many SA members were appointed 'auxiliary police'.

THE REICHSTAG FIRE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The campaign of intimidation against the communists and others on the left of politics was already under way when, on the night of 27 February 1933, one week before the election, the *Reichstag* building in Berlin burnt down. There has been historical debate about whether the Nazis themselves burnt the *Reichstag*. The evidence now suggests that it was the work of a disturbed Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, who was detained in the *Reichstag* building during the blaze. Although the Nazis may not have been responsible for the fire, they certainly took full advantage of it.

The *Reichstag* fire had two major consequences. First, it gave Hitler an excuse to unleash a massive attack on the German communists. The Nazis played on the theme of a communist conspiracy against the state. Communist publications were banned and in the days that followed almost 4000 arrests took place, including the communist members of the *Reichstag*. But in a clever political move, the Communist Party (KPD) itself was not banned. It was needed for the election campaign, to whip up fear, to be the focus of the Nazi propaganda and above all to split the vote of the working class. If the communists were eliminated too early, the strength of the more moderate left-wing party, the SPD, would grow.

The second consequence of the fire was the introduction, one day later, of the decree *For the Protection of People and State*. This emergency decree, prepared by the Nazis, was issued by President von Hindenburg, who was shaken by the *Reichstag* fire and was persuaded that the communist plot to the state was real. Under Article 48 of the constitution, the decree suspended the sections of the constitution that guaranteed the basic rights of the German people.

The basic freedoms of the German people that had been enshrined in the Weimar Constitution were suspended, and the basis of the totalitarian state was established. The decree was legal, for it was issued according to the constitution.

Hitler's conservative allies and many middle-class Germans did not object to the Emergency Decree, believing that there was a real threat from the left. What they failed to note, or chose to ignore in early 1933, was that there was nothing to stop the Nazis using these powers against other people as well as the communists. This is in fact what happened. What was supposed to be a temporary emergency measure remained in force for the next 12 years, until the collapse of Nazi Germany. A permanent state of emergency existed from 1933, which gave the regime the 'legal' authority to carry out acts of terror and persecution against the German people.

THE ENABLING ACT

In the election of 5 March the Nazis increased their representation in the *Reichstag* from 196 to 288 seats. Their coalition allies, the German National People's Party (DNVP), won 52 seats. Of the 647 seats in the *Reichstag*, the government held 340 seats, which was a working majority.

To establish his dictatorship, Hitler never cancelled the democratic Weimar Constitution; he simply altered it and then ignored it. Already the Emergency Decree of 28 February 1933 had suspended the clauses that guaranteed the basic freedoms of the German people. On 23 March 1933, when the new *Reichstag* met, Hitler proposed the Enabling Act (*Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and the State*). This new law would give the government the power, for the next four years, to issue laws regardless of the *Reichstag*. Hitler claimed that the government needed these special powers in order to deal with the great problems confronting the nation. The Enabling Act represented a change to the constitution, and this meant that the measure had to be passed by a two-thirds vote of the *Reichstag*. Once again the appearance of legality was preserved.

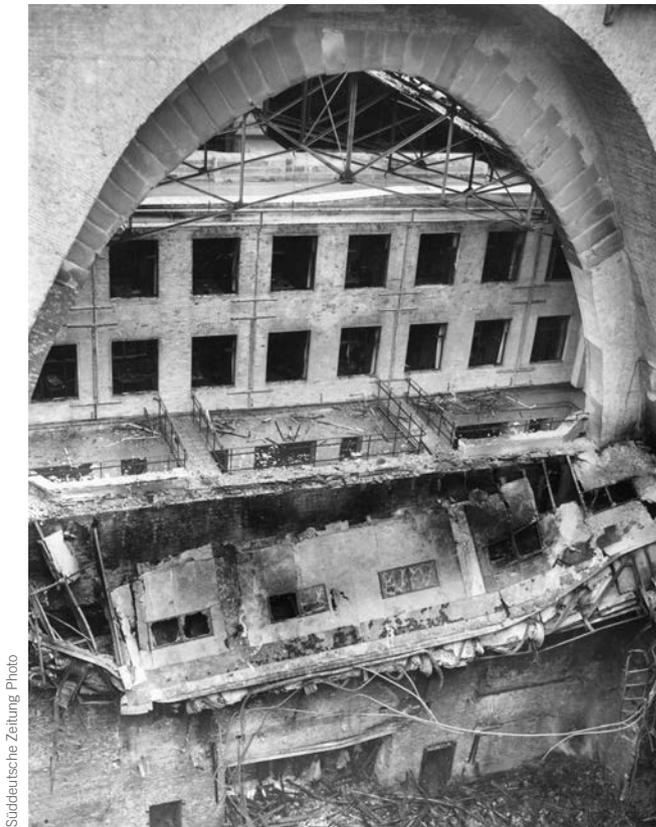
For the Protection of People and State

Decree of the Reich President For the Protection of People and State, 28 February 1933

On the basis of Article 48 paragraph 2 of the constitution of the Reich the following is decreed as protection against communist acts of violence endangering the state.

1 Articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124, and 153 of the constitution of the German Reich are cancelled until further notice. This allows certain restrictions to be imposed on personal freedom, on the right to express a free opinion, the freedom of the press, of association, and the right to hold meetings, it allows restrictions on the secrecy of the mail, post and telecommunications system, the ordering of house searches and confiscation of property and restrictions on property rights. This decree applies from the day of publication.

Reich President von Hindenburg Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler Berlin 28 February 1933



Süddeutsche Zeitung, Photo

SOURCE 3.3 The interior of the *Reichstag* building after the fire on the evening of 27 February 1933, which the Nazis blamed on the communists

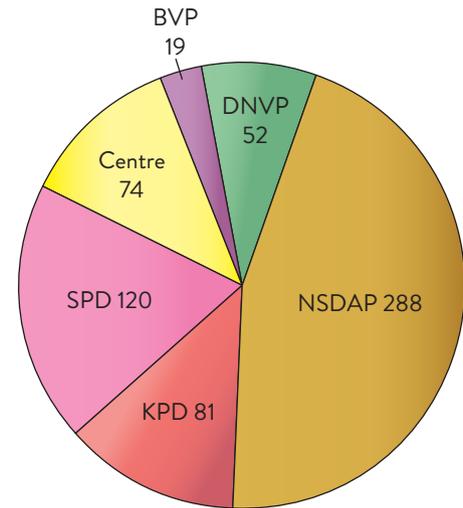
Questions

- 1 Explain why the presidential decree *For the Protection of People and State* of 28 February 1933 was legal.
- 2 Using a copy of the Weimar Constitution, which can be found on the internet, identify the content of the articles of the Weimar Constitution that were suspended by this decree.
- 3 Describe some of the possible actions that the government could take against individual Germans as a result of this decree.

Election results of March 1933

Questions

- 1 Since the time of Chancellor Brüning, every government had to rely on the president for support. Explain why this situation changed after the March 1933 election.
- 2 If the German Communist Party (KPD) was banned immediately after the election, explain why it was allowed to contest the election in March 1933 and win 81 seats in the *Reichstag*.
- 3 Why did Hitler still need the support of other political parties to pass the Enabling Act?



Total number of *Reichstag* seats: 647

SOURCE 3.4 Party seats in the *Reichstag* after the election of March 1933

VOTING FOR DICTATORSHIP

Immediately after the election the German Communist Party was banned. Its 81 representatives, elected a few weeks earlier, had either been arrested or had fled when the new parliament met in its temporary meeting place of the Kroll Opera House in Berlin. In an atmosphere of great tension, with the *Reichstag* encircled by SA troops who kept up a chant of 'We want the Bill or fire and murder', the debate began. The Nazis and the Nationalists had 340 votes, but they needed 432 votes (two-thirds of the *Reichstag*). The Socialists (SPD) defied the Nazis and, in a speech of great courage, their leader Otto Wels condemned the proposal. The SPD was a political party that had always championed democracy. Now in the dying days of German democracy the party did not desert it.

When the vote was called, 441 members of the *Reichstag* voted in favour of the Enabling Act. The 94 socialists present voted against it. Hitler gained his two-thirds because the Centre Party and the other middle-class parties gave their support to the bill. Some of the Centre Party members were persuaded by Hitler's assurances that the basic institutions of government were not threatened and that the measure was necessary and temporary. The Centre Party, which also had a large following from Germany's Roman Catholics, were also assured by Hitler's promise that the rights and interests of the Church would not be infringed. Many middle-class Germans believed that it was necessary to deal with the threat from the left and that political life would then settle down. Others voted out of fear, believing that if Hitler's demands were not met he would force them by other means.

With the passage of the Enabling Act in March 1933, Hitler achieved dictatorial powers. It had been done under the cover of legality and with the real threat of violence, and it was achieved swiftly and with little resistance. Hitler was now independent of the *Reichstag* and other political parties. He was also independent of the president, as the president's signature was no longer required in order to issue decrees. A law became law simply by it being announced by the government.

The Enabling Act, March 1933

Source A: The Enabling Act (*Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and the State*), March 1933

Article 1: Beside the procedure laid down in the Reich constitution, laws for the Reich can also be resolved upon by the Reich Government.

Article 2: Reich Laws resolved upon by the Reich Government may deviate from the Reich Constitution provided they do not deal with the institution of the *Reichstag* ... The rights of the Reich President shall remain intact.

Article 3: Reich Laws, resolved upon by the Reich Government, are issued by the Reich Chancellor ... unless otherwise stipulated they become effective on the day following their promulgation.

Article 5: This law comes into effect on the day of its publication. It ceases to be valid on 1 April 1937.*

** In fact, the law was renewed in 1937, 1941 and 1943.*



top/Kunstsibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Photothek Willy Römer/Willy Römer

SOURCE 3.5 Otto Wels, the leader of the SPD. Displaying great courage in the face of Nazi threats, he was the only person to speak out against introduction of the Enabling Act in March 1933.

Source B: Otto Wels, leader of the SPD, speaks against the Enabling Act, 23 March 1933

After the persecution which the Social Democratic Party has experienced recently nobody will reasonably ask it or expect it to vote for the Enabling Law that has been introduced ... The elections of March 5 have brought a majority to the governmental parties and thereby afforded the opportunity of ruling in accordance with the letter and spirit of the constitution. Where the opportunity exists, there exists also the duty ... We hold to the principles of a constitutional state, of the equality of rights and of social justice, of freedom and socialism. No Enabling Law gives you the power to destroy ideas that are eternal and indestructible ... We hail the persecuted and the distressed ... Their courage of conviction, their unbroken confidence guarantees a brighter future ... You can take our lives and our freedom, but you cannot take our honour. We are defenseless but not honourless.

J Hohlfeld & K Hohlfeld (eds), *Dokumente der Deutschen Politik und Geschichte*, Vol 4, 1953, pp. 38–40.

Source C: From the German historian, Joachim Fest

The rapid, unopposed extinction of all political forces from Left to Right remains the most striking feature of the Nazi take-over. If anything could have demonstrated the sapped vitality of the Weimar Republic, it was the ease with which the institutions that had sustained it let themselves be overwhelmed. Even Hitler was astonished. ‘One would never have thought so miserable a collapse possible,’ he declared at Dortmund in July. Actions that only a short time before would have unleashed riots close to civil war were now met with a shrugging fatalism [acceptance] ... one of the keen observers of the period noted that as the unanswered blows ‘into the face of truth and freedom’ went on, as the elimination of the other parties and of the parliamentary system progressed, there was a growing feeling ... the past was dead. The future, it seemed, belonged to the regime.

J Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 415.

continued



Bundesarchiv/Georg Pahl

SOURCE 3.6 Adolf Hitler introducing the Enabling Act into the German *Reichstag* 23 March 1933. The meeting took place in the Kroll Opera House in Berlin. The Nazi banner inside the parliament was a visual reminder of the dominance of the Nazi Party.

Questions

- 1 Explain how the Enabling Act would give Hitler greater powers.
- 2 Why did the Enabling Act include the provision that 'The rights of the Reich President shall remain intact'?
- 3 Identify the main point Otto Wels was making in his speech (Source B) in opposition to the Enabling Act.
- 4 Explain what Wels meant by the words 'Where the opportunity exists, there exists also the duty'?
- 5 Can you offer two reasons why the SPD would most certainly have opposed the Enabling Act?
- 6 Explain the main point the historian Joachim Fest is making in extract Source C.

GLEICHSCHALTUNG

The passing of the Enabling Act allowed the government to move quickly to bring the key agencies and institutions of the state under the control of the Nazi Party and to suppress the remaining elements of German democracy. It also gave the Nazis the power to eliminate their political opponents.

This was the period of *Gleichschaltung*, a word the Nazis themselves used and which means the 'process of coordination'. It was not enough for the Nazis to come to power; now Germany itself was to be transformed. Germany was to be Nazified so that the philosophy of National Socialism and the control of the party pervaded every aspect of German life. By a series of laws simply issued by the government and by the use of force and pressure, every aspect of the German state was brought under the authority of the Nazi Party – the political system, the civil service, the trade unions, the law, the education system, the economy, cultural, social and artistic life, and finally the armed forces. Germany was in the process of becoming a totalitarian state in which total control and authority would rest with the Nazi Party.

ASPECTS OF GLEICHSCHALTUNG

April 1933

Law for the Restoration of the Professional Public Service

All 1.6 million civil servants who worked in government departments were required to support the philosophy of National Socialism. Civil servants of Jewish descent were dismissed.

2 May 1933

The abolition of the German trade union movement

The German trade union movement was abolished, trade union leaders were arrested, and the organisations were declared illegal. In their place a new organisation, to be known as the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*, DAF), came into being, led by a high-ranking Nazi official, Dr Robert Ley.

14 July 1933

The abolition of all political parties except the Nazi Party

The *Law Against the New Establishment of Political Parties* was issued. All political parties were declared illegal except the Nazi Party.

14 July 1933

Law Against the New Establishment of Political Parties

The Reich Government has resolved upon the following law, which is herewith promulgated: Article I: The National Socialist German Workers' Party constitutes the only political party in Germany. Article II: Whosoever undertakes to maintain the organizational structure of another political party or to form a new political party will be punished . . . with penal servitude of up to three years, or with imprisonment of from six months to three years.

January 1934

The abolition of the German states

The *Law for the Reconstruction of the Reich* was issued in January 1934. It abolished the separate parliaments of the German states. The only government body in Germany was now the government in Berlin.

April 1934

Control of the legal system

In April 1934 the government set up a special People's Court outside the regular judicial system, to deal with crimes against the state. There was no right of appeal against judgments from the People's Court. In a series of laws issued during 1933 and 1934 all judges and lawyers were expected to interpret the law by considering the 'good of the national community' and, above all, 'the will of the *Führer*'.



Corbis/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

SOURCE 3.7 German judges swore an oath of allegiance to Hitler in the State Opera House in Berlin 1934.

The restless Brownshirts

The existence of the *Sturmabteilung* (SA), or Brownshirts, was a major factor in the Nazis coming to power. Since the party was first established they had fought street battles and terrorised opponents, and now that the Nazis had come to power they expected their reward. Under their leader, Ernst Röhm, the SA numbered some three million by 1934. The organisation was far larger than the German army, which saw the SA as a rival and a threat.

The SA was made up of men mainly from the lower middle class, from the working class and from the unemployed. By 1934 it was a restless and unstable force, representing the more radical element of the Nazi movement. Some believed in a form of socialism, which had been a policy of the early party, but had been discarded by Hitler when the party came to power.

THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

By 1934 the activities and indeed the existence of the SA began to endanger the stability of the state, as they interfered in various levels of government, and the gap between the party organisation and the SA widened. The other issue at play was that after Hitler's victory the SA had simply lost its purpose. Its role as the street force, the bullyboys who helped Hitler to power, was gone. Their chief enemy, the German communists, had been defeated. Even its potential role as a security force for the Nazi state was being eclipsed with the emergence of the SS. The SA began to lose its reason for being and this lack of purposeful activity increased its instability.

The army and the SA

The greatest problem for the SA was the German army. Ernst Röhm himself appears to have been uncertain as to what the SA role should be in relation to the German army. There is evidence that Röhm believed that the SA, and not the regular army, should be the main military force in Germany. There is other evidence to suggest that Röhm was seeking a subsidiary role for the SA and that rather than replace the professional army, the SA would have other military duties similar to a **militia**.

militia

A fighting force that is made up of civilians or non-professional fighters

.....

The army leaders were totally opposed to all such ideas, and saw the SA as a threat to the standing and honour of the German army. Hitler also assured his military commanders that the German armed forces would be 'the sole bearer of arms' in the *Reich*. In his view, the SA had served its purpose, and now it was important to win the loyalty of the army. It was the army, not the SA, that Hitler needed in order to carry out his future policy of conquest in Europe. Many in the army were sympathetic to the Nazi movement and tempted by its promises of rearmament and restoring Germany's honour and military tradition, but they were intensely suspicious of the potential threat from the SA.

In 1934 President Hindenburg's health was failing and he had only a few months to live. Hitler intended to abolish the office of president when Hindenburg died and to take for himself the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces. For this he needed the backing of the army, not the SA. In a secret arrangement with the military leaders, Hitler agreed to deal with the SA in return for the armed forces supporting him as Hindenburg's successor. The army was the only remaining force in German society that could bring Hitler down. It was essential that the army transfer its loyalty from Hindenburg to Hitler, and one of the prices for that loyalty was the removal of the threat of the SA.



Sddeutsche Zeitung Photo

SOURCE 3.8 The *Sturmabteilung* (SA), or Brownshirts, parading through the city of Weimar in 1933 at the height of their influence and power



bpk/Heinrich Hoffmann

SOURCE 3.9 Ernst Röhm, commander of the SA. Röhm and other leaders of the SA were murdered in the Night of the Long Knives in July 1934.

Ernst Röhm and unrest in the SA, 1934

[Hitler] is betraying all of us ... his old comrades aren't good enough for him. He brings in these East Prussian generals. They're the ones he pals around with now ... Adolf knows perfectly well what I want. I've told him often enough ... Are we a revolution or aren't we? ... Right now all he wants to do is sit up in the mountains and play God. And men like us have to cool our heels when we're burning for action.

Ernst Röhm, quoted in H Rauschnig, *Hitler Speaks*, London, 1939, p. 143.

Questions

- 1 Explain, in an extended paragraph, what had been the function of the SA before Hitler came to power.
- 2 What complaint is Röhm making here about Hitler and the Nazi movement now that they have come to power?
- 3 Can you offer one reason why, according to Röhm, Hitler 'pals around' with army generals?

Elimination of Röhm and the SA leadership

By June there were rumours of the SA forcing a change of government. On 21 June Hitler had a brief meeting with an ailing President von Hindenburg who told Hitler that unless the government resolved the present state of tension he would declare martial law and hand over government to the army.⁶ Hitler delayed no longer. The following day (22 June) he gave his approval for the action against the SA leadership.

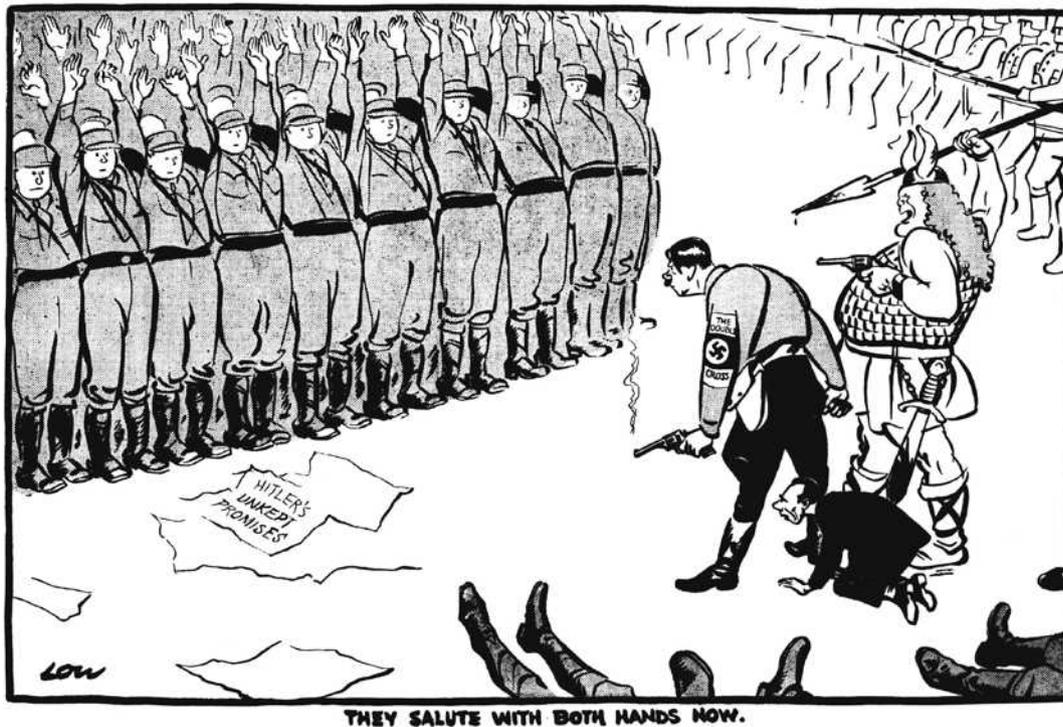
The role of the SS

The planning for the elimination of Röhm and the leadership of the SA was the work of the SS, which had much to gain from the elimination of their rival, the unruly and unpredictable SA. Death lists were drawn up for what was code-named 'Operation Hummingbird'. The army was not directly involved in the elimination of the SA, although there is little doubt that the army leadership knew that Hitler was about to act.

The so-called 'Night of the Long Knives' took place on 30 June 1934. Members of the SS took the SA leadership by surprise and, in a coordinated activity in Berlin and Munich, Röhm and hundreds of SA officers were arrested and accused of plotting to overthrow the state.

The Night of the Long Knives

Source A: 'They salute with both hands now'



SOURCE 3.10 'They salute with both hands now' – a cartoon by David Low, published in the *Evening Standard*, London on 3 July 1934. Herman Göring is depicted as a Viking warrior and the person on hands and knees is Joseph Goebbels.

continued

continued

Source B: Hitler after the blood purge of June 1934

In the state there is only one bearer of arms, and that is the army; there is only one bearer of the political will and that is the National Socialist Party ... I was responsible for the fate of the German people and thereby I became the supreme judge of the German people ... I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders of this treason ... And let it be known for all time to come that if anyone raises his hand to strike the state then certain death is his lot.

Quoted in J Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973, p. 469.

Source C: A message to the German army from Defence Minister, General von Blomberg, 1 July 1934

The Führer with soldierly decision and exemplary courage has himself attacked and crushed the traitors and murderers. The army, as the bearer of arms of the entire people, far removed from the conflicts of domestic politics, will show its gratitude through devotion and loyalty.

J Noakes & G Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 216.

Source D: Law Concerning Measures Taken in Defence of the State, July 1934

The Reich Government has resolved to pass the following law which is herewith promulgated: All measures that were taken to crush the treasonable aggression of 30 June 1934, July 1 and 2 1934, were acts of defence of the state and therefore legally justified.

Berlin July 3, 1934 *Reichsgesetzblatt*, I, 1934, No. 71, p. 529.

Questions

- 1 Explain the point the cartoonist is making through the swastika armband in Source A.
- 2 Identify the group in the top-right corner of the cartoon.
- 3 What is the cartoonist suggesting by the comment, 'They salute with both hands now'?
- 4 How does the cartoon support the statement made by Hitler in Source B?
- 5 Explain why the army gave silent support for the Night of the Long Knives.
- 6 The army had always been an influential and independent force in the German state. In what way does Blomberg's statement (Source C) indicate that this could be about to change?
- 7 What does the law (Source D) say? Explain why Hitler would insist on the proclamation of the law of 3 July 1934.

During the next day many SA officers, including Röhm, were shot. The death list was expanded to include others that the Nazis wanted removed. General von Schleicher, the former chancellor, and his wife were shot in their home. Gustav von Kahr, who as prime minister of Bavaria had used the police to oppose Hitler's Beer Hall *Putsch* in 1923, was gunned down in Munich. Vice-chancellor von Papen was saved only because of his close friendship with Hindenburg, but his associates were murdered and Papen himself was placed under house arrest. In all, over 200 people were murdered in the purge of the SA.

The events of 30 June 1934 not only reaffirmed the brutality of the regime, they were also a major step in strengthening Hitler's power base. In one move Hitler had put down the threat of the SA and satisfied the German army.

THE DEATH OF PRESIDENT VON HINDENBURG

On 2 August 1934, only a month after the murder of Röhm and the SA leadership, President von Hindenburg died at the age of 87. A new law that was prepared while Hindenburg was still alive combined the office of president and chancellor. Hitler was now head of state, head of the government, and supreme commander of the armed forces. All members of the armed forces took an oath of loyalty, not to Germany or the constitution, but to Hitler personally.

Hitler demands allegiance

Oath of loyalty of the military forces of the Reich to Hitler

I swear before God this sacred oath that I will render unconditional obedience to the Führer of the German Reich and People, Adolf Hitler, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and that I shall be prepared as a brave soldier to stake my life at any time for this oath.

Reichsgesetzblatt, I, 1934, p. 785.

Law Concerning the Sovereign Head of the German Reich, 1 August 1934

The Reich Government has enacted the following law which is hereby promulgated:

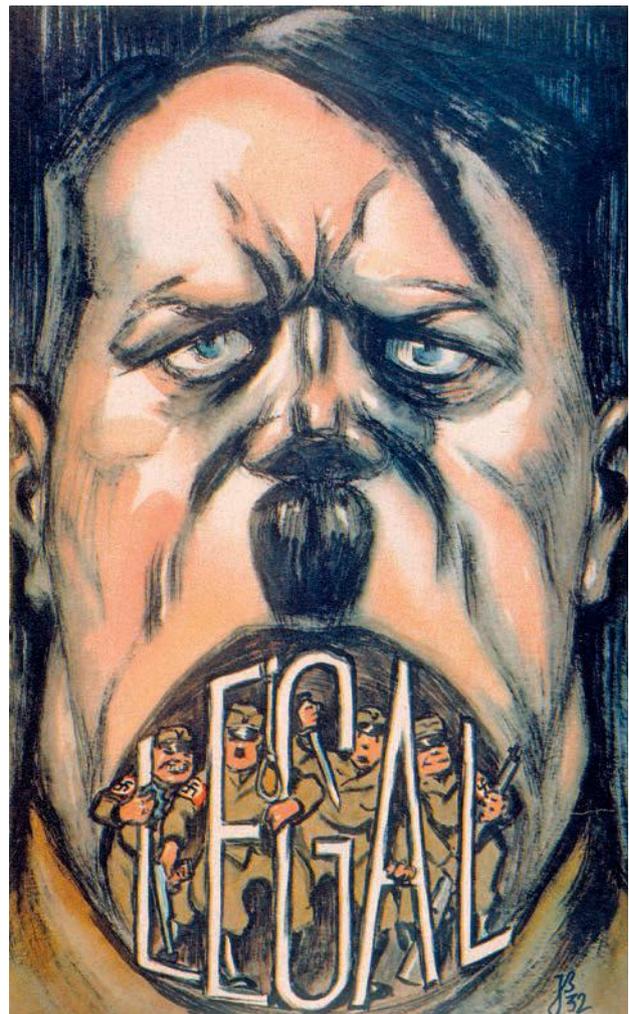
Article 1

The office of Reich President will be combined with that of Reich Chancellor. The existing authority of the Reich President will consequently be transferred to the Führer and Reich Chancellor, Adolf Hitler.

Article 2

This law is effective from the moment of the death of Reich President Hindenburg.

Reichsgesetzblatt, I, 1934, No. 98, p. 747.



bpk/Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin

SOURCE 3.11 How Herr Hitler eats the word 'legal'!

continued

continued

Question

In an extended written response, explain how Hitler moved from being legal chancellor in January 1933 to legal dictator by August 1934.

By 1934 democracy had ceased, political parties were gone, the trade unions, civil service and other agencies of the state were controlled, the basic freedoms of the German people no longer existed, and the repression of opponents had begun, with concentration camps and the secret police. Totalitarianism had triumphed. From the death of Hindenburg, Hitler was now the *Führer* (leader), Head of Government and Head of State, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, supreme ruler of the German state.

Second Reich

The period of Germany history from 1871 to 1918

Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934)

Paul von Hindenburg's remarkable life spanned some of the most important periods of modern German history. As a young military officer in 1871 he was present when Bismarck proclaimed the creation of the German Empire or **Second Reich**. As a much older man in 1933, it was Hindenburg, as president of the Weimar Republic, who appointed Hitler as chancellor and so ushered in the Third Reich.

Hindenburg, the myth

Hindenburg came from a landed aristocratic family in eastern Prussia and embraced a military career. He fought in the war of 1866 against Austria and in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71 that saw the defeat of France and the union of the different Germanic states to create the new German Empire. In 1911, aged 55 years, he retired from the German army after an undistinguished career and looked forward to life on his country estate. He believed his military days were over.

The outbreak of the First World War, however, changed Hindenburg's life and in August 1914 he was recalled to military service. The Russians were advancing into eastern Prussia and Hindenburg was given command of the German Eighth Army in the east. Joining Hindenburg as his Chief of Staff, or second-in-command, was General Erich Ludendorff. In late August 1914, the German army in the east defeated the Russians at a major battle at Tannenberg in eastern Prussia. The victory turned Hindenburg into a national hero although credit for this victory lay mainly with Ludendorff, who was a far more able military thinker.

Hindenburg was promoted to field marshal and became a national symbol and a revered public figure. A personality cult developed and he was seen as the embodiment of the German military ideal and tradition. Hindenburg promoted this image and skillfully managed his own reputation and fame. Before Hitler, he became the national father figure, the saviour many Germans were seeking. Recent historical research suggests that the 'Hindenburg myth' was an essential factor in allowing Hindenburg's role and influence to extend well beyond the war and, despite his advanced age, to make him president of the Weimar Republic after 1925.



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Hindenburg and the peace

With the end of the war, with the much-hated Treaty of Versailles and with the political and social unrest that followed, Hindenburg protected his reputation by avoiding any action that might harm his image. Although it was Hindenburg and Ludendorff who called for the armistice in 1918 that ended the First World War, it was the civilian politicians who were left to carry the blame. Like so many Germans he embraced the idea that Germany had not been defeated; rather it had been betrayed. When the treaty was announced, he added to his populist appeal by urging the government to reject the Treaty of Versailles; ‘as a soldier,’ he wrote, ‘I must prefer honourable defeat to a shameful peace’. In 1919, aged 72, Hindenburg once again retired into private life, with his reputation and image intact. He had become a living hero.

President von Hindenburg

In February 1925 President Ebert died and in the search for a new president, the nationalist groups pressured the retired field marshal to represent the forces of the right. Hindenburg had been reluctant to stand, but in a narrow victory, the 77-year-old field marshal won and became president.

Everything in Hindenburg’s conservative military background represented loyalty to the old Germany. He remained a monarchist and before accepting the office of Reich President, Hindenburg sought permission from the ex-Kaiser in exile in Holland. His election was welcomed by the army and right-wing groups, which became more tolerant of the republic now that Hindenburg was its head.

Although the Weimar Republic now had a president who really did not believe in the republic and had no democratic background, he worked conscientiously to carry out his duties and to uphold both the republic and the constitution. Until his health failed and the political problems became too great, he used the prestige of his name and reputation to make the system work even though the system was not of his liking.

After the start of the Great Depression economic and political problems placed great demands on President von Hindenburg, who at 83 years of age was now forced to play a more



SOURCE 3.12 A huge wooden statue of Hindenburg was set up in Berlin, 1917. Patriotic Germans nailed money to it in support of the war. Similar statues were erected in other parts of the country.

Corbis/Hulton-Deutsch Collection

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active role in the decision making. The constitution gave him significant powers and he increasingly turned to a small circle of men, particularly conservative military figures, who influenced the elderly president. Chief among these was General Kurt von Schleicher, who enjoyed political intrigue and exercising power. Equally powerful and motivated by self-interest were the president's son, Oskar von Hindenburg, and the president's state secretary, Otto Meissner. From 1930 until the appointment of Hitler in 1933, presidential rather than parliamentary rule applied, as Hindenburg supported his chancellors with the authority of Article 48.

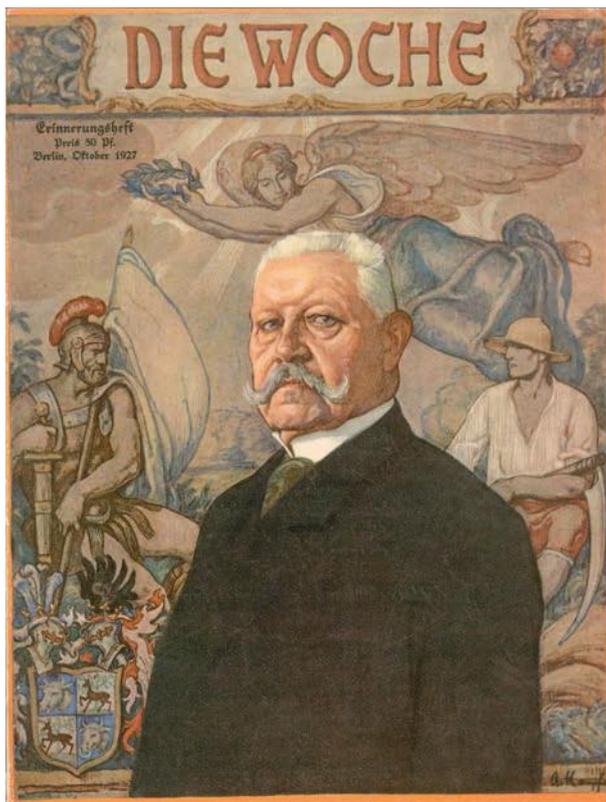
The re-election of Hindenburg as president in 1932 at the advanced age of 84 marked a critical point. As his health began to fail, those close to the president believed that it was time to

do a deal with the Nazis and to bring them into government. Hindenburg himself was the most reluctant to give in to Hitler and his movement. From their first meeting in October 1931, he had developed a dislike of Hitler, suggesting he may have made a good Minister for Posts. Only in January 1933, after being assured that the Nazis would come into government under the control of Papen and his supporters, did Hindenburg finally relent.

Hindenburg and history

Hindenburg lived another 18 months after he appointed Hitler chancellor. He approved the Emergency Decree after the *Reichstag* fire, which removed the basic liberties of the German people and he signed the Enabling Act that gave Hitler almost absolute power. When Hitler ordered the purge of the SA leadership, Hindenburg approved. The fact that his former close associate General von Schleicher was murdered at that time made no difference. The only time Hindenburg ever objected to a Nazi action was the law of April 1933 that removed Jews from the German civil service. Hindenburg insisted that Jewish civil servants who had served in the war were to be exempt.

Many historians have seen Hindenburg as a weak-willed man, easily influenced by others. He has been portrayed as an ageing relic from another age and politically well out of his depth in the politics of Weimar Germany. John Wheeler-Bennett who wrote one of the first biographies of Hindenburg, called him a 'wooden titan'. More recent research from historians



SOURCE 3.13 President Paul von Hindenburg on the cover of the German newspaper *Die Woche* (*The Week*) October 1927.

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including the German scholars Wolfram Pyta (2007) and Anna von der Goltz (2009) have challenged this view. They suggest that Hindenburg was not in fact a helpless old man manipulated by his advisers. Wolfram Pyta argues that when Hindenburg was the military hero of the nation during the First World War, he was in fact much more of a politician than a soldier. In 1933, despite his age, he was in full possession of his mental faculties.

Hindenburg saw several short-term and long-term advantages in appointing Hitler. Since 1930 Hindenburg had been forced to use his presidential power to keep a government in office only by stripping the *Reichstag* of its political power. This could not continue and the Hitler Government, with conservative controls, offered a solution to the impasse.

Hindenburg was free to choose his own chancellor and he chose Hitler as a way of restoring a functional government to the nation. Hindenburg himself believed in the need for order, for military strength and the German national community.

After Hitler came to office there was a new relationship between the president and his chancellor. Hindenburg himself was less politically involved, retiring in his last year to the role of the venerable field marshal, the symbol of the unity of the nation.

He still held the final authority, including the power to remove Hitler from office, and as long as he lived the army's loyalty was always to Hindenburg rather than Hitler. As Hindenburg was dying in late July 1934, Hitler secured the loyalty of the German army by eliminating the leadership of his own SA. When Hindenburg finally died in August 1934 a new law quickly transferred the powers of the president to Hitler himself.

But Hitler also inherited more than Hindenburg's power; he inherited the myth. It was the start of a new age and the symbolism and heroic virtues so long associated with Paul von Hindenburg now passed to Adolf Hitler, the symbol of the new Germany.

An assessment of Paul von Hindenburg

Hindenburg was an imposing figure. Well into his ninth decade he retained the ramrod bearing of a Prussian officer ... His broad square visage [face] seemed frozen in an expression of pensive sadness. For many Germans this visage conveyed profound gravity and resolute devotion to arduous duties. Although his public image was one of imperturbable strength, Hindenburg lacked a strong independent will and seldom took the initiative on his own. Throughout his career, he depended heavily upon advice of those



British Cartoon Archive, University of Kent.

SOURCE 3.14 Cartoon by Sidney 'George' Strube from the *Daily Express*, London, which appeared on 3 August 1934, a few days after the death of President von Hindenburg

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around him, a trait that became more pronounced with advancing age ... Despite persistent rumours of senility, all reliable accounts indicate that, although ponderous and slow, Hindenburg remained lucid [alert] until the final illness that ended his life near the close of his eighty-seventh year in 1934, well after Hitler's dictatorial rule had reduced him to a figurehead.

Turner, Henry A, *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*, Bloomsbury, London, 1997, p. 4.

Questions

- 1 Why is Hindenburg referred to as 'a Prussian officer'?
- 2 What three character traits does the document suggest were a feature of Hindenburg's personality?
- 3 Explain what message the cartoonist is seeking to convey in the cartoon of August 1934. What part of the document extract could support the message of the cartoon?
- 4 What evidence do you have to support the conclusion that the situation suggested in the cartoon of August 1934 had already become a reality?

Terror and repression

The great majority of the German people accepted the Nazi state, but those who would not accept Nazi rule or who actively opposed the movement had to be dealt with. During the 1930s the Nazi Party developed a highly organised police structure that was used to terrorise the population. There was no attempt to hide the activities of the security police, for terror was more effective if it was seen to be happening.

THE SS (SCHUTZSTAFFEL)

The *Schutzstaffel* (which means 'defence unit') had begun in 1925 as Hitler's personal bodyguard and was originally part of the SA. In 1929 Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler as its leader and he developed the SS into an elitist force, disciplined, loyal, and totally devoted to Hitler and the philosophy of National Socialism.

The organisation expanded rapidly. All members of the SS were required to meet high educational and physical standards. They also had to have a pure racial background through a number of generations.

The *Schutzstaffel* (the SS) and its agencies became very much a 'state within the state', but one totally loyal to the Nazi movement and its leader. Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer*, who commanded the entire organisation, was responsible only to Hitler. He led a massive organisation totally independent of the law or any other restraint.



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 3.15 Heinrich Himmler, Head of the SS and later Chief of the German Police. One of the most feared figures in Nazi Germany, he was responsible for all police and security matters in the Third Reich, including the work of the *Gestapo* and the operation of the concentration camps.

Members of the SS saw themselves as an elite racial community and this was expressed through almost mystic SS rituals, which strengthened the bond of unity and comradeship. Their motto, 'My Honour is Loyalty' meant unconditional obedience to Hitler and to the state.

In June 1934 the SS proved its loyalty and effectiveness by eliminating Ernst Röhm and the leadership of the SA in the Night of the Long Knives. Hitler rewarded the SS by making it an independent organisation, no longer part of the SA, and its power and influence grew dramatically.

In June 1936 Hitler appointed Heinrich Himmler Chief of the German Police, which gave him responsibility for all police agencies in Germany. Himmler already had control over the *Gestapo* (the secret state police) and the SS Security Service (the *Sicherheitsdienst* or SD) led by Himmler's deputy, Reinhard Heydrich.

The SS also carried out police functions, and it dealt with all internal opponents of the regime. It was responsible for the deportation of people from conquered lands and for the racial policies carried out in these conquered territories. It was involved with the enslavement of foreign labour and the illegal use of prisoners of war. It ran the concentration camps and in later years became the instrument that carried out Hitler's racial policy. During the war, the SS was also responsible for the operation of the extermination camps, where millions of Jews and other opponents of the regime were systematically murdered.

The nature of the SS

Like monks or priests there was a lengthy novitiate [period of training] for the SS involving ideological instruction, labour and military service, and the acquisition of sporting prowess. Initiation rites added to the solemnity of being admitted to a privileged group, a sort of secular [non-religious] priesthood. The midnight oath-swearing ceremony was emotional. According to one eyewitness, 'Tears came to my eyes when in the light of torches, thousands of voices repeated the oath in chorus. It was like a prayer. The questions and the responses included 'Why do we believe in Germany and the Führer? Because we believe in God we believe in Germany which He created in His word and in the Führer, Adolf Hitler, whom He has sent to us'. Like all sects and totalitarian organizations, the SS recognised no departures and no separate private sphere. The individual was in for life.

M Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History*, Macmillan, London, 2000, p. 194.

Questions

- 1 How did the SS differ from the SA?
- 2 What conclusions can you draw about the nature of the SS from this extract?

THE GESTAPO – TERROR TO REPRESSION

Another important agency of control was the secret state police, or *Geheime Staatspolizei* (*Gestapo*), set up by a decree on 30 November 1933. In April 1934 Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS, became responsible for its operations.

The *Gestapo* was responsible for the internal security of the *Reich*. It was made up of men from the political police forces of the various German states, and they were charged to 'investigate and suppress all anti-state activities'. The *Gestapo* gained a reputation for ruthlessness and

efficiency as it carried out surveillance and sought to identify the enemies of the state. Its headquarters at Prinz Albrecht Straße in Berlin, to which all other *Gestapo* offices reported, was the most feared address in the *Reich*. Its methods were brutal and it was a key part of the overall terror system that stretched from the streets to the concentration camps. Propaganda created the image that the *Gestapo* was able to detect all opposition and that, in the words of the Canadian historian Robert Gellately, ‘anyone could be summoned to police headquarters, mistreated, and held almost indefinitely before being sent to a concentration camp under protective custody’.⁷

The *Gestapo* had the power to imprison people without the need for judicial proceedings. This power was based on the *Decree for the Protection of People and the State* of 28 February 1933, issued after the *Reichstag* fire, which suspended the civil liberties to the German people. The Nazi justice official Dr Werner observed, ‘As long as the [*Gestapo*] carries out the will of the leadership, it is acting legally.’

A person could be sent to these camps if by their attitude or manner they endangered the existence or security of the people and the state. *Gestapo* records that survived the war show that people were arrested for ‘refusal to work’, ‘spreading religious propaganda’, ‘working against the *Reich*’, ‘loafing on the job’ and ‘defeatist statements’.

Recent historical research has cast new light on the operation of the *Gestapo*. The work of the Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society* (1990), has confirmed that the *Gestapo* was not a massive, all-embracing organisation, and the image of *Gestapo* agents on every street corner and railway station is wrong. Much of the work of the *Gestapo* was administrative. The exception to this was in Berlin and industrial regions like the Ruhr where *Gestapo* activity was more proactive. Local-level research into the surviving *Gestapo* files suggest that the *Gestapo* was not as large or widespread as the propaganda suggested and was in fact under-resourced, with inadequate numbers of personnel. At the time Germany had a population of 69 million and the *Gestapo* probably had no more than 15 000 personnel by 1939, many of them career police, sympathetic to the Nazi regime, whose careers began in the Weimar era.

In the Nazi state citizens were encouraged to report on each other, and the *Gestapo* depended very much on denunciations or reports from ordinary Germans for the bulk of its cases. In this



Bundesarchiv/Georg Pahl

SOURCE 3.16 The most feared address in Germany. The inside of the headquarters of the SS and *Gestapo* situated at Prinz Albrecht Straße, Berlin. The basement contained a complex of prison cells and interrogation rooms.

way the Nazi state was able to police what would be normally private and personal, including private criticisms of the regime, and even intimate relationships between Germans and Jews, and acts of homosexuality (all of which were illegal). The *Gestapo* did not have to look very hard, as some 60 to 90 per cent of its cases began this way. While some denunciations were made because of a sense of duty to the regime, many of these denunciations were based on malicious rumours or people settling personal grievances or old scores. Denunciations were more common in the large towns than in the close-knit, smaller village communities.

By the time the Second World War broke out, the *Gestapo* employed only 45 000 people, although these people certainly controlled networks of informers. It was these informers from the general population, ordinary citizens, from post office officials to zealous Hitler Youth, who reported the actions or even the casual remarks of others, who kept the *Gestapo* and the terror state functioning. The networks of police informers and agents included lower-level Nazi supporters who were responsible for streets or city blocks and reported on neighbourhood activity.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

A concentration camp is a place where people who were seen as opponents of the regime were confined, usually under harsh conditions and without recourse to the law. The first concentration camps came into being within days of Hitler coming to power in 1933 and were used to detain the large number of political opponents, especially communists and socialists. The first camps at Dachau and Oranienburg were run by the SA (*Sturmabteilung*). Within a year, a centralised concentration camp system was set up throughout the country, and after the purge of the SA leadership in 1934 control of the camps passed to the SS. To administer the camps, a new unit was set up within the SS structure, the *Totenkopfverbände* or Death's Head units.



SOURCE 3.17 Prisoners at a concentration camp in 1938 wearing the distinctive coloured triangles

Between 1934 and 1939, more than 200 000 people passed through the concentration camps. In 1939, when the war began, there were 21 000 people confined in six major camps: Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Flossenbürg, Mauthausen and Ravensbrück. Those imprisoned included communists and socialists, political opponents, trade unionists, religious dissenters, anyone who dared to speak out against the regime, and people deemed socially undesirable, such as homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and gypsies. Everyone was reduced to a number and had to wear a coloured triangle to signify their status. Political prisoners wore a red triangle, 'professional criminals' green, Jehovah's Witnesses purple, homosexuals pink, and 'anti-socials' black. Conditions in the camps were severe. The death penalty was imposed for some offences and many prisoners were beaten, abused or worked to death. There was no control over the brutality in the camps because they were the sole responsibility of the SS.

In 1938, in a government step to remove people classed as 'anti-social' from the national community, the SS arrested over 10 000 men. Many of these were drifters, alcoholics or people classified as 'work shy'. They were placed in new concentration camps, some especially built near stone quarries and brickmaking factories. The official name for this policy was *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*, 'annihilation through work'. German companies working with the SS often profited from the forced labour.



SOURCE 3.18 The main gate at Sachsenhausen concentration camp with the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work will make you free). Today the site is a memorial to the many thousands who died there between 1936 and 1945.

akg-images/ullstein bild

The police state at work

Source A: A wave of terror

When Hindenburg appointed Herr Hitler chancellor this man issued a pamphlet warning citizens against the dangers of dictatorship. After the *Reichstag* fire on 27 February he had stated without reserve his opinion that the National Socialists had done this themselves to unloose a wave of terror. He had worked hard to oppose the Nazis in the March elections and issued a pamphlet against the anti-Jewish boycott of April 1933.

In July, not quite six months after Hitler became chancellor, this man went for a walk one evening and did not return. At Christmas his wife shot their five-year-old son and herself. She had that morning received a package – a cigar box – marked with a swastika and the word traitor before her husband's name. It contained ashes.

N Waln, *Reaching for the Stars*, Cresset Press, London, 1940, p. 80.

continued

Source B: The frighteningly oppressive atmosphere

The technique of conducting a successful system of terror is to terrorise the maximum number of people with the minimum amount of effort. It is impossible to listen in to every telephone call or to overhear every conversation, but the art lies in the use of the spot check thereby letting people know when they were not being monitored. This in itself was unnerving ...

One closed the door carefully and conducted conversations in a whisper. One looked over one's shoulder in a public place before speaking. One did not trust the mails. One chose with great care the rendezvous where one met one's friends. No one who has not experienced it can imagine the frighteningly oppressive atmosphere of a totalitarian regime.

J Wheeler-Bennett, *Knaves, Fools and Heroes in Europe between the Wars*, Macmillan, London, 1974, p. 73.

Source C: Letter from the SS to a mother seeking information about her son, 1934

To Frau Erna Habich, Stuttgart

Based on your letter of 19 November 1934 addressed to the Führer and handed in here, I am informing you that on the instructions of the Political Police Commander of the State, Reichsführer SS Himmler, that your son, Walther Habich was executed on 1 July 1934 as a consequence of the Röhm *Putsch*.

Since this execution took place in defence of the State, no further explanation is required.

Heil Hitler.

Source D: Regulations at Dachau Concentration Camp

Issued by the Commandant, Theodor Eicke, November 1933

Tolerance means weakness. In the light of this concept, punishment will be mercilessly handed out whenever the interests of the Fatherland warrant it ... The following offenders, considered as agitators, will be hanged. Anyone who ... discusses politics, carries on controversial talks or meetings, forms cliques, loiters around with others who for the purpose of supplying propaganda of the opposition with atrocity stories, collects true or false information about the concentration camp, receives such information, talks about it to others, smuggles it out of camp into the hands of foreign visitors or others ...

Anyone who physically attacks a guard or SS man, refuses obedience or declines to work at his place of work ... will be shot on the spot or subsequently hanged.

Quoted in W Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Secker & Warburg, London, 1960, p. 339.

Questions

- 1 What insight does Source A provide about the nature of the terror state and how it operated?
- 2 What points being made in Source B help to explain how the Gestapo operated in Nazi Germany?
- 3 Based on Source C, how long had Frau Erna Habich been unaware of her son's fate?
- 4 The letter in Source C not only sought to inform but it was also intended to have another effect. What effect do you think a letter like this was intended to achieve?
- 5 What could be said to be Theodor Eicke's main concern as he drafted the regulations for Dachau concentration camp (Source D).

The nature of government in Nazi Germany

In Nazi Germany Hitler was the source of all authority and power. However, beneath the all-powerful *Führer*, the German state was certainly not the monolithic and ordered structure it appeared. Despite the image of Nazi Germany as a strict, organised and disciplined state, historians who have studied the structure of the Nazi state agree that what existed was not an efficient disciplined government, but rather what some have called a chaotic structure of government.

WORKING TOWARDS THE FÜHRER

There were two main administrative structures in Germany after 1933: those associated with the government agencies and the civil service, and those associated with the Nazi Party. As a result, there was duplication and rivalry. Hitler also deliberately encouraged duplication in government, and he frequently set up a special body or agency to deal with an issue that could have been handled by an existing government body. This situation of administrative chaos was not helped by Hitler himself who stood above the daily conflict of government and displayed very little interest in the everyday administration of the state. Cabinet government as it had operated ceased to function after 1934 and Hitler gave very few directions in the area of domestic policy. As the *Führer*, his prestige could not allow him to become involved in minor administrative conflicts. The lines of the administrative structure that had served Germany so well in the past became blurred.

Hitler, who exercised the ultimate authority, usually failed to provide clear direction, interfering only in those areas of government that interested him and usually in a very haphazard way. He was reluctant to intervene when there was conflict over the exercise of power by competing individuals or agencies. As competing groups sought to interpret and implement the *Führer's* will, the exercise of power in Germany depended on one's relationship with and access to Hitler. The German historians Hans Mommsen (1971) and Martin Broszat (1969) have suggested that Hitler was in fact a 'weak dictator'.

The British historian Ian Kershaw reaffirmed that the Third Reich was not an efficient and organised state, but one in which officials in government competed and operated without clear direction from above. Hitler's slightest remarks were accepted as orders with the force of law. The task of others was to interpret the will of the *Führer* and struggle to carry out what they perceived this will to be. This was one of the reasons that the regime became increasingly radical, as officials sought to outdo each other, while Hitler stayed above the strife and conflict.

Hitler as dictator

Source A: Ernst von Weizsäcker, German diplomat and politician

There was no such thing as a government with cabinet meetings. Ministers in charge of departments might for months on end, or even for years have no opportunity of speaking to Hitler ... ministerial skill consisted in making the most of a favourable hour or minute when Hitler made a decision, this often taking the form of a remark thrown out casually which went its way as 'an Order of the Führer'.

Ernst von Weizsäcker, *Memoirs* (trans. by John Andrews), Gollancz, London, 1951.

Source B: Sebastian Haffner, German historian

Hitler deliberately destroyed the state's ability to function in favour of his personal omnipotence [almighty power] and irreplaceability, and he did so right from the start ... [He] brought about a state of affairs in which the various autonomous authorities were ranged alongside and against one another, without defined boundaries, in competition and overlapping and only he himself was at the head of it all ... absolute rule was not possible in an intact state, but only amidst controlled chaos.

S Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1979, p. 43

Source C: Working towards the Führer

Hitler's form of rule invited radical initiatives from below and offered such initiatives backing so long as they were in line with his broadly defined goals. This promoted ferocious competition at all levels of the regime among competing agencies and among individuals within those agencies. In the Darwinist jungle of the Third Reich, the way to power and advancement was through anticipating the 'Führer's will', and, without waiting for directives, taking initiatives to promote what were presumed to be Hitler's aims and wishes ... Hitler's personal temperament, his unbureaucratic style of operating, his Darwinistic inclination to side with the stronger, and the aloofness necessitated by his role as Führer, all merged together to produce a most extraordinary phenomenon; a highly modern, advanced state without any central coordinating body and with a head of state largely disengaged from the machinery of government.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, London, 1998, pp. 530–33.

Questions

- 1 What does Source A reveal about the way Hitler governed Germany?
- 2 Explain the main point being made by Sebastian Haffner in Source B.
- 3 Explain why you agree or disagree with Haffner's comment that 'absolute rule was not possible in an intact state, but only amidst controlled chaos'.
- 4 Does Ian Kershaw in Source C support or contradict Sebastian Haffner's view in Source B?
- 5 Explain what Ian Kershaw means by the phrase 'the Darwinist jungle of the Third Reich'.
- 6 Explain how government could become more radical if there were not clearly controlled boundaries of authority.

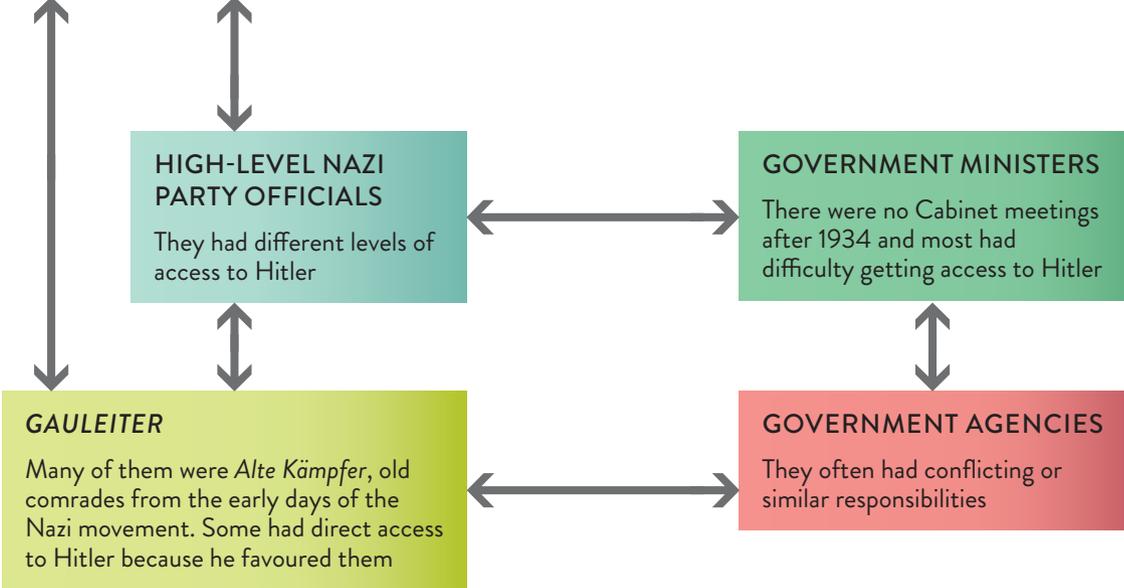
HOW THE NAZI STATE OPERATED



Corbis/The Print Collector

THE FÜHRER MYTH
 The cult of Hitler, deliberately created and promoted by German propaganda, put Hitler as the man chosen by fate to lead the German people

THE FÜHRER'S WILL – WHAT HITLER BELIEVED
 From his statements and the broad aims of the Nazi Party, officials sought to interpret and carry out his will – to 'move towards the Führer'



THE FÜHRER'S STYLE OF GOVERNMENT

- + Hitler was only interested in foreign affairs; he had little interest in domestic policy
- + Frequently away from Berlin, the centre of government
- + Rarely intervened in decision making and happy to appoint conflicting groups to deal with issues
- + Believed that lesser officials should simply seize the initiative
- + Regardless of position, real power in Germany depended on access to Hitler
- + Access to Hitler was limited and controlled
- + His will was transmitted down to party officials and *Gauleiter*
- + Ambitious officials sought to outdo each other in carrying out what they perceive to be the 'will of the Führer'

Conclusion

Despite the fact that Hitler and his movement made no secret of the fact that they were opposed to democracy, the republic and the parliamentary system, the President of the Weimar Republic appointed him Chancellor of Germany in January 1933 and in the 18 months that followed he moved almost with ease from the position of legal chancellor to legal dictator in a totalitarian state. He did this through two important steps: the Emergency Decree of February 1933 and the Enabling Act the following month. Until 1945 these pieces of legislation remained, in a strictly legal sense, the basis for Hitler's authority. Armed with this legality, Hitler asserted his authority by the use of pressure and threat and by very skillful manipulation of the political system, the constitution and his political opponents. Basic civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, were abolished and trade unions and other political parties were banned. The functions of the state were effectively 'Nazified'. At the same time Hitler ruthlessly turned on his own supporters, eliminated the leadership of the SA, and finally won the support of the German army.

The one man Hitler could not threaten was the man who had appointed him, the aged but venerated President von Hindenburg. Even here no chances were taken. At his death Hindenburg's private wish for a restoration of the monarchy was ignored and within hours a law was finalised for the legal transfer of his power to Hitler.

Chapter summary

- + In January 1933 Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany in a coalition with the German National Party and other conservative politicians.
- + New elections were called for March 1933.
- + In February 1933 the *Reichstag* burnt down, which gave the Nazis the opportunity to blame the communists, their major political opposition.
- + An Emergency Decree, issued under Article 48 of the constitution, removed the basic freedoms of the German people.
- + In March 1933 the Enabling Act (*Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and the State*) altered the constitution and gave the government the power to pass laws without the consent of the *Reichstag*. This, in effect, established Hitler's dictatorship.
- + In the months that followed the Nazis began the process of *Gleichschaltung*.
- + Terror and repression now began. Concentration camps were opened for political opponents and Germany became a police state, suppressing all opposition to the Nazi movement.
- + In July 1934 Hitler eliminated the leadership of his own SA because they were a possible threat to his authority. It was also a deliberate strategy to capture the support of the German army.
- + With the death of President von Hindenburg in August 1934 the last trace of the Weimar Republic ended as Hitler united the powers of the president and chancellor to become the *Führer* of the German people.
- + All members of the German armed forces took an oath of loyalty, not to Germany or the constitution, but to Hitler himself.

Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/germany>.

Further resources

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- Kershaw, Ian, *Hitler*, Penguin Books, London, 2008.
- Nicholls, AJ, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler*, St Martins, New York, 1970.
- Rees, Laurence, *The Dark Charisma of Adolf Hitler*, Edbury Press, 2013.

Endnotes

- 1 Borkenau, Franz, *The Totalitarian Enemy*, Faber & Faber, London, 1940, p. 130.
- 2 Domarus, Max, *Hitler Speeches and Proclamations*, I.B. Tauris & Co, London, Vol. 2, p. 836.
- 3 Burleigh, Michael, *The Third Reich: A New History*, Pan Books, 2001, p. 1.
- 4 Quoted in Pinson, KS, *Modern Germany*, Macmillan, London, 1966, p. 193.
- 5 Quoted in Johnson, Paul, *Modern Times*, HarperCollins, New York, 1992, p. 285.
- 6 Wheeler-Bennett, John, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics*, Macmillan, London, 1953, pp. 319–20.
- 7 Gellately, Robert, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy, 1933–1945*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 259.



Chapter review activities

- 1 Draw a line to connect the individuals in Group A with the correct clue in Group B.

Group A	Group B
Heinrich Himmler	Leader of the SPD in 1933
Ernst Röhm	Former chancellor
Franz von Papen	Former chancellor, shot in July 1934
Gustav von Kahr	Head of SA
Otto Wels	Former leader of Bavaria, shot in July 1934
Kurt von Schleicher	Head of the SS
- 2 Select two of the individuals in question 1 and, in an extended paragraph, explain their role in Hitler's rise to power by 1934.
- 3 What is totalitarianism and what are some of the characteristic features of a totalitarian state?
- 4 In what ways were the SA and the SS similar organisations and in what way were they different?
- 5 What was Article 48 and why was it important in the political history of the time?
- 6 Define *Gleichschaltung* and give three examples of *Gleichschaltung* in action.
- 7 What was the Night of the Long Knives and why was it important in the rise of Hitler to absolute power?
- 8 How important was the *Gestapo* as an agency that sought to control the German people?
- 9 Explain the role of the German army in the events that brought Hitler to power.



- 10 Prepare a list of arguments both for and against the following statement:
'Paul von Hindenburg is the classic case of a public figure for whom it could be said "the events found the man".'
Prepare a multimedia presentation on the life of Paul von Hindenburg in which you address the following issues:
- a the significant events in his life
 - b an assessment of his contribution to German history.
- 11 Explain what some historians mean when they refer to Hitler as 'a weak dictator'.

Essay questions

- 12 Account for the consolidation of Nazi power between 1933 and 1934.
- 13 To what degree could it be argued that by 1934 Germany was a totalitarian state?



CHAPTER FOUR

Creating a new Germany – the racial state

Major change took place in almost every aspect of German society in the 1930s, while an all-embracing and consistent propaganda onslaught sought to persuade the German people to accept and embrace the new Nazi state.

After 1933, many Germans believed that the nation was entering a period of revival. The creation of this new Germany satisfied the hopes and expectations of millions of German people. Hitler himself was very popular and many came to see him as a saviour, the man forging a new unity in the German people and saving the state from the social and economic divisions of the past.

The Nazis saw the coming to power in 1933 not just as a change of government, but as the start of a revolution that would change German society. They sought not only to control, but also to reshape the state according to their ideology. At the very heart of this ideology was the concept of race.

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + What impact did the Nazi dictatorship have on people's day-to-day lives during the Third Reich?
- + What role did race and anti-Semitism play in the lives of Germans during the Third Reich?
- + How did the Nazis change the cultural life of Germany?

◀ Girls lining the Wilhelmplatz in Berlin in 1938 to greet their *Führer*

Social life in the Third Reich

The Nazis preached the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the National or People's Community). This was to be a new society, a harmonious national community, free from class division and social conflict. Class barriers and class conflict would be replaced by a new sense of national unity. It was also to be a racial state – a community in which all racially pure Germans were equal, and one in which all citizens displayed their loyalty to the nation, to its leader and to each other.

Nazi propaganda constantly promoted the idea of putting the community first. In this *Volk* (people's) community, all racially pure Germans were to have a sense of belonging – the worker and the factory owner, the student, the farmer, the professional person and the civil servant were to be united in a community of blood and comradeship. The class barriers that had characterised German society in the past were to be broken down, and in this new community everyone was to put the national interest above self-interest. After the political and social divisions of the Weimar era, it was a concept that had appeal.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN NAZI GERMANY

The Hitler Youth

The Nazis placed great importance on controlling the youth of Germany. If the Third Reich was to endure, it was essential that the next generation supported the racial and social principles of the Nazi movement.

The Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*) movement had been formed as part of the Nazi Party as early as 1922. In March 1931, Hitler appointed Baldur von Schirach as Reich Leader of the Hitler Youth (*Reichsführer der Hitler Jugend*). Schirach carried through important reforms of the Hitler Youth movement and membership steadily increased.

After the Nazi Party came to power, other youth organisations, including the Boy Scouts and all sporting clubs, were gradually combined with the Hitler Youth or closed down. For a while the youth groups of the Roman Catholic Church survived, but in the late 1930s they too were banned. The aim was to bring all German boys and young men under the Hitler Youth, and in December 1936 a law made membership of the Hitler Youth compulsory for all German boys aged 15 to 18 years. By the time the war broke out in 1939, the membership of the Hitler Youth stood at 7.2 million. To administer this organisation, over 8000 full-time and over 700 000 part-time youth leaders carried out the tasks associated with it.

Activities of the Hitler Youth

The Hitler Youth aimed to control and shape the entire youth of the nation to support the philosophy and aims of the Nazi state. Boys aged 6 to 10 years were encouraged to join the *Pimpfe* (Little Fellows) and move to the *Deutsches Jungvolk* (Young People) from the age of 10 to 14. These young boys were expected to engage in tests of endurance. They were taught map and compass reading and above all they were taught the meaning and purpose of Nazism and their role as the future leaders of the *Reich*. As a step forward, they were awarded the 'Blood and Honour' dagger to mark their entry into the Hitler Youth when they reached the age of 14.

The Hitler Youth, for boys aged 14 to 18, placed great emphasis on physical activity, including hiking and camping trips. Boys were expected to be able to run 60 metres in 12 seconds and long

jump 2.75 metres. They were taught toughness and self-discipline, and loyalty and obedience to superiors. All members were expected to know the words of Nazi songs and anthems and everyone swore an oath of loyalty to Hitler. Schoolwork and classes were regularly interrupted by Hitler Youth activities. Many of these activities were community based, reinforcing the idea of the community before the individual.

The youth movements supported party activities by handing out electoral materials and taking part in marches and rallies. The young were always present at the great political rallies and on days of celebration in the Nazi calendar such as the *Führer's* birthday. One day of the annual Nuremberg Party Rally every September was devoted to youth, and thousands of Hitler Youth were transported to Nuremberg to meet their *Führer*.

Organising young people

BOYS

6–10 years	The Little Fellows (<i>Pimpfe</i>)
10–14 years	The German Young People (<i>Deutsches Jungvolk</i>)
14–18 years	The Hitler Youth (<i>Hitler Jugend</i>)

GIRLS

10–14 years	League of Young Girls (<i>Jugendmädelsbund</i>)
14–18 years	League of German Maidens (<i>Bund Deutscher Mädel</i>)

On education and the German youth

The German youth must learn military virtues. Their bodies must be steeled, made hard and strong, so that the youth may become capable soldiers who are healthy, strong, trained, energetic, and able to bear hardships. Gymnastics, games, sports, hiking, swimming, and military exercises must all be learned by the youth. Our youth should not sit in stuffy rooms and develop crooked backs and weak eyes ... A youth being trained for such important national duties must accept the idea of following the *Führer* absolutely and without question ... They must learn to obey so that they, having themselves learned to obey, can believe in and trust their own leadership and can grow to be leaders themselves. Only he who has learned to obey can lead. Germany no longer believes that the masses can lead themselves by majority rule! The masses themselves are nothing! We do not need a people ruled by majority votes, but a people with the will to leadership.

Die Erziehungsgrundsätze des neuen Deutschlands (The Educational Principles of the New Germany), Frauen-Warte No. 22, 1936–37, p. 692.

Questions

- 1 List four major points in this document that reflect the intent of the Hitler Youth.
- 2 What particular part of this document reaffirms the fact that Germany was now a totalitarian state?



Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo

SOURCE 4.1 The Hitler Youth included the very young. Little Fellows or *Pimpfe* collecting clothes for the Winter Relief campaign of 1937, an annual Nazi initiative to provide for the disadvantaged during the winter months.



bpk/Kunstabtheke, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Dietmar Katz

SOURCE 4.2 Poster encouraging girls to join the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, the female equivalent of the Hitler Youth

League of German Maidens (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*)

The girls' equivalent of the German Young People was the *Jugendmädelbund* (the League of Young Girls) for girls aged 10 to 14 years and the equivalent of the Hitler Youth was the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (the League of German Maidens) for girls aged 14 to 18 years. Girls were expected to devote themselves to physical fitness through camping and hiking trips and to prepare for their future role as German wives and mothers. By 1935, over 1.5 million girls were active in the League of German Maidens. At the age of 18 girls could join Faith and Beauty (*Glaube und Schönheit*), an organisation in which girls received instruction in aspects of motherhood and were conditioned to accept the Nazi image of the role of women in German society. There was a special emphasis on training girls in domestic skills such as cooking and sewing and in the physical graces, as a preparation for marriage.

Life in the Hitler Youth

Source A



Corbis

SOURCE 4.3 Boys attending a Hitler Youth camp at Tempelhof, Berlin in 1934

Source B

Adolf Hitler, 6 November 1933

When an opponent says, 'I will not come over to your side', I calmly say, 'Your child belongs to us already ... you will pass on. Your descendants however now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing else but this new community.'

Quoted in NH Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, Vol 1, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 544.

Source C

In 1936 Stephen Roberts, Professor of History at the University of Sydney, visited Nazi Germany. This is an extract from his book *The House That Hitler Built*, written in 1937.

The fight for the minds of youth starts in the cradle. The baby's earliest tales must be in accordance with Nazi ideas. The Führer is 'the man sent from heaven' ... At the age of ten each little boy gets a brown shirt with the pfennigs [money] he has saved, or if he is too poor, his comrades often subscribe for him. Henceforth he belongs to the *Young Folk*. The little girl will join the *League of German Girls* ... Little boy and girl alike are pledged to sacrifice everything for the Führer and are taught that he is everything and themselves nothing. After four years the boy of fourteen joins the *Hitler Youth*, the outward symbol of his promotion being the change to brown trousers and the presentation of a red swastika armband ... Henceforth he is a storm trooper in miniature ...

It would be foolish to underestimate the enthusiasm of young Germany for their Führer ... Hitler has captured the children heart and soul, and it is one of the oldest adages [sayings] of dictatorship that he who has control over the elementary [primary] schools for five years is

continued

continued

established in power forever ... Their attitude of mind is absolutely uncritical. Time out of number they answer my queries [about] why they believed by the reply, 'Because the Führer wills it!'

S Roberts, *The House That Hitler Built*, Methuen, London, 1937, pp. 205–7.

Questions

- 1 In what way does the image of the Hitler Youth camp (Source A) promote the Nazi ideal of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the People's Community)?
- 2 What is the main point Hitler is making in Source B? Does the image in Source A support or contradict the message of Source B?
- 3 Professor Stephen Roberts (Source C) was an Australian historian who visited Germany in 1936. What are the main points Roberts is making?
- 4 Explain how Roberts' observation in Source C is similar to the point being made by Hitler in Source B.
- 5 What does Professor Roberts mean by the comment in Source C that 'he who has control over the elementary schools for five years is established in power forever'?

Resistance to the Hitler Youth

It would be wrong to assume that all young people enjoyed or participated willingly in the Hitler Youth. By the end of the 1930s Nazi officials grew increasingly concerned at elements of resistance and non-conformity in the behaviour of thousands of young people who had grown tired of the regimentation and demands of the youth movement.

One group that rejected the Hitler Youth were the so-called Edelweiss Pirates who emerged in the late 1930s. Made up mainly of working-class youths from the industrial area of western Germany, they formed gangs that engaged in non-conformist action, including provoking and fighting Hitler Youth groups. Another group that reacted against Nazi youth policy was the Swing Movement. These young people, mainly from middle-class, urban backgrounds, reacted against the social conformity of the Nazi state. They expressed their individuality by dressing in English-style clothes, by embracing swing and jazz music (which was officially frowned upon), and by refusing to accept the Nazi ideal of the People's Community. Although the idealism and energy of the Nazi movement did have an appeal for the German youth, recent historical research suggests that the Nazis were only partially successful in winning the loyalty of young Germans.

EDUCATION IN NAZI GERMANY

Before the Nazis came to power, Germany had developed one of the best educational systems in the world. From kindergarten (a German concept) to university, the quality and standing of German teaching and learning were of the highest order. All of this changed after 1933. Hitler dropped out of school when he was 15 years old and for the rest of his life he maintained a contempt for formal education, the teaching profession and intellectual pursuits.

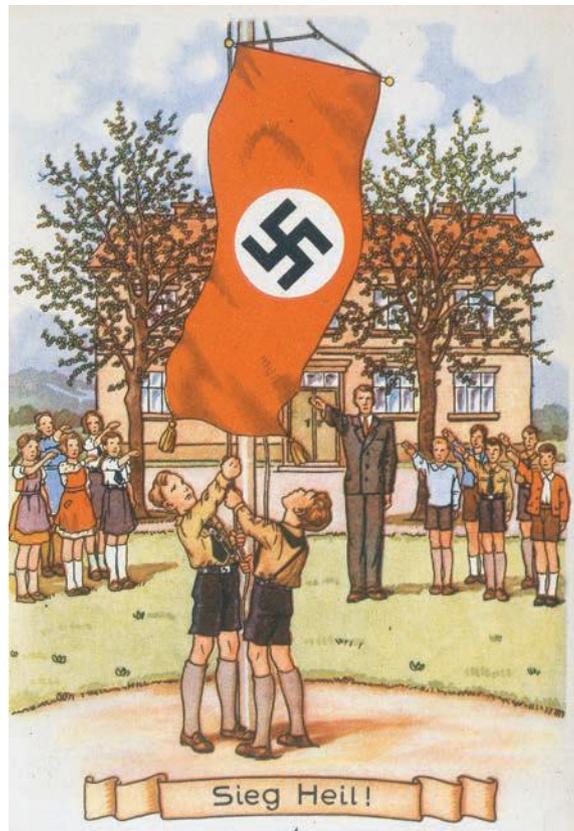
Education and control

Dr Bernhard Rust, who was appointed Reich Minister for Science, Education and Culture in 1934, sought to make the educational system into a support for the Nazi state. The aim of education was indoctrination; it had to be controlled so it reflected traditional German values and served the purposes of the state. There was little place for genuine intellectual thought or free inquiry. Boys and girls were educated separately and they were taught subjects that reflected what the Nazis saw as their future role in German society. Girls did domestic courses, no foreign languages, and only basic mathematics and science. The more demanding levels of mathematics and science were taught mainly to boys. Sports and physical activity received great attention. Although he took no exercise himself, Hitler preached the importance of physical activity in the young. He believed that it made the young bold and strong. It taught the boys toughness and hardship and was vital in building the health of the future mothers of the *Reich*.

The Nazi ideas on race received special attention at all levels of schooling. Biology received great emphasis at school and all children had to study a new subject called 'Science of the Races'. Teachers were required to instruct their students in 'the natural causes and effects of all racial and hereditary problems' and 'no boy or girl should leave school without a complete knowledge of the necessity and meaning of blood purity'.¹ History courses were also revised and textbooks rewritten, with special emphasis on nationalism and militarism, and a study of Germany's heroic past and the rise of National Socialism. *Mein Kampf* became a set text for special study. Religious education became optional and was later abolished.

All teachers were forced to accept the new direction and they were required to join the National Socialist Teachers' Alliance. Jewish teachers and others who challenged the changes were removed, and students were encouraged to report on their teachers to the state authorities. The Nazis had little trouble from the teaching profession. Many teachers held conservative views and had not found the freedom and openness of the Weimar era to their liking. Most teachers accepted the new regime without resistance, and the percentage of teachers who joined the Nazi Party was the highest for any profession. In 1936 some 32 per cent of the teaching profession were members of the party.

The government also set up special schools to prepare the future Nazi leaders. The National Political Training Institutes (NAPOLAS) modelled themselves on the old Prussian military



SOURCE 4.4 Primary school children give the Hitler salute at the raising the flag at school. From the primary school textbook *Mein Buch (My Book)*, 1941.

akg-images/Ernst Kutzer

academies with their emphasis on duty and discipline. Also, carefully selected students were sent to the Adolf Hitler Schools (*Adolf-Hitler-Schulen*) to study a specialised curriculum that included political and racial studies.

Before 1933 Germany had the finest universities in Europe but this too now changed. The quality of teaching fell as courses were revised to place more emphasis on science and technology. Jewish members of staff were removed and many other academics who valued intellectual freedom also left, many moving to countries such as Britain and the United States. Among those who left Germany at this time was the physicist Albert Einstein. Enrolments declined, the number of women at universities fell from 20 000 in 1933 to only 5000 by 1939, and by the late 1930s university professors were complaining about the quality of the students in university courses, the result of the Nazi educational system.



Getty Images/FFG

SOURCE 4.5 Boys in a physics class using a model artillery piece and a target. A focus on militarism was a feature of senior school study for boys. The Hitler portrait on the wall was also a feature of most German classrooms.

Education in the Third Reich

Source A: From a mathematics textbook, 1935

An airplane flies at the rate of 240 kilometres per hour to a place at a distance of 210 kilometres in order to drop bombs. When may it be expected to return if the dropping of the bombs takes 7.5 minutes?

L Snyder (ed), *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1976, p. 79.

Source B: A student remembers his schooldays

A large part of our compulsory reading in German lessons was world war literature ... amidst all the horrors of modern warfare the comradeship of the front was still triumphant and if you died you were at least awarded the Iron Cross ... it was as if they [the teachers] had never lived in times of peace.

D Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, Penguin Books, London, 1987, p. 148.

continued

continued

Source C: From a primary school reading book, 1935

Far from our homeland, our Führer Adolf Hitler has a beautiful villa. It is located high up in the mountains and is surrounded by an iron fence ... One day the Führer came out once again and greeted the people in a very friendly way. They were all full of joy and jubilation and reached out with their hands to him. In the very first rank stood a little girl with flowers in her hands, and she said in her clear child's voice 'Today is my birthday'.

The Führer took the little blond girl by the hand and walked slowly with her through the fence into the villa. Here the little girl was treated to cake and strawberries and thick sweet cream ... Then she said very politely 'I thank you very much' and 'Goodbye'. Then she made herself as tall as she could, put her little arms around the Führer's neck, and now the little girl gave the great Führer a long long kiss.

GL Mosse, *Nazi Culture – A Documentary History*, Schocken, New York, 1966, p. 287.

Source D: The German history syllabus, 1934

Weeks	Subject	Relation to the Jews
1–4	Pre-war Germany, the class-war, profits, strikes.	The Jew at large!
5–8	From Agrarian to Industrial State. Colonies.	The peasant in the claws of the Jews!
9–12	Conspiracy against Germany, Encirclement.	The Jew reigns! War plots.
13–16	German struggle – Starvation!	The Jew becomes prosperous! Blockade! Profit from German want.
17–20	The Stab in the Back.	Jews as leaders of the November insurrection.
21–24	Collapse. Germany's Golgotha. Versailles.	Jews enter Germany from the East. Erzberger's Crimes! Judah's triumph!
25–28	Adolf Hitler. National Socialism.	Judah's foe!
29–32	The bleeding frontiers. Enslavement. The Volunteer Corps.	The Jew profits by Germany's misfortunes. Loans (Dawes, Young).
33–36	National Socialism at grips with crime & the underworld.	Jewish instigators of murder. The Jewish press.
37–40	Germany's Youth at the helm! The Victory of Faith.	The last fight against Judah.

The National-Sozialistische Erzieher, 42, 1934.

Questions

- 1 What conclusions can you draw about the nature of education in Nazi Germany from Sources A, B, C and D?
- 2 How is Hitler depicted in Source C? Why would such material be part of the readings for the very young?
- 3 Identify the key themes that are being developed in the history course in Nazi Germany after 1934 (Source D).

WOMEN IN NAZI GERMANY

During the Weimar Republic there had been significant moves to advance the rights and position of women in German society. Under the constitution women had been given absolute equality with men; they had the vote and the right to hold public office. Before the Depression the employment rate for women in Germany was 400 per cent greater than in the United States, and Germany had more female members of parliament than any other European country. When the Nazis came to power all of this changed.

Discrimination against women

The Nazis believed that individuals found their true fulfillment by their identification with the nation or national community. Everyone had a role in this society that was to be accepted without question. For women it was the lesser role, for in Hitler's concept of struggle, women were weaker and inferior.

During the Third Reich women were excluded from political life. At the foundation of the Nazi Party in 1921, a resolution banned women from leadership positions in the party. No senior positions in Nazi Germany were held by women and they accounted for only 6 per cent of the party membership. Married women were discriminated against in the workforce in favour of men and 800 000 left the labour market between 1933 and 1935. There was a deliberate policy to force married women out of the workforce and into the home; only single women were allowed to work. Particular professions were closed to women altogether; for example, women were forbidden to practise law, and the admission of women to universities was drastically cut. Only unmarried women over 35 could hold a permanent position in the civil service, and women were not permitted to serve on juries because it was believed that their reasoning was based on emotions.

Despite their unequal status in the Nazi state, many women remained strong supporters of Hitler and his movement. Many women accepted that under the liberal Weimar era the role of women had changed and they were pleased to return to the more traditional role of obedient wife and loving mother. Many accepted that men and women had different roles in life and that the place of women was in the home. The German Women's League (*Nationalsozialistische Frauenschaft*, abbreviated to *NS-Frauenschaft*) was set up to define and encourage the new role for women in the *Reich*. Its leader, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, held the impressive title of Reich Women's Leader (*Reichsfrauenführerin*), but she was never counted in the party leadership or in policy decisions concerning women.

Idealised motherhood



bpk/Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin/Dietmar Katz

SOURCE 4.6 The front page of *NS-Frauen-Warte*, the official Nazi magazine for women, depicts the Nazi image of idealised motherhood.

Questions

- 1 Explain how the image in Source 4.6 from a state-controlled women's magazine reflects the Nazi view of the role of women and the family.
- 2 Based on this source material and your research, prepare an extended paragraph on what was expected of women in Nazi Germany, and how the role of women changed from what it was in Weimar Germany.

'Children, Kitchen and Church' (*Kinder, Küche und Kirche*)

Although there were leadership roles for women in traditional 'female' occupations, in women's organisations and in the youth movement, the role of women in the Nazi state was generally confined to family life and motherhood. 'The mission of women,' said Goebbels, 'is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world'. He was echoing the views of his leader. 'The woman has her own battlefield,' said Hitler. 'With every child she brings into the world she fights a battle for the nation.'² The slogan often used was 'Children, Kitchen and Church' (*Kinder, Küche und Kirche*). This concept was constantly reinforced by posters that depicted healthy blond children in the care of their Aryan parents. At school, girls were taught that their future role was one of motherhood and looking after their husband. For German women, the simple and the stylistic coexisted in the Nazi state. While many German women accepted the Nazi ideal and were homely, uninterested in the latest fashion or make-up and devoted to family, other women, particularly in the major metropolitan centres, were still happy to embrace fashion and the latest Western styles.

The German birthrate had been declining since the First World War and the Nazis were determined to reverse the trend. They introduced policies that were aimed at increasing the number of births for the 'racially pure' sections of society. Marriage and family were encouraged and the ideal family was seen as one with at least four children. Families of four or more children were known as *kinderreich* (rich in children) and these families gained concessions such as reduced rail fares and reduced gas and electricity bills.

By the *Law for the Promotion of Marriage* issued in June 1934, married couples who were passed as 'genetically healthy' were eligible for a loan of 1000 Reichsmarks, provided the

woman gave up her job at the time of the wedding and took no paid employment as long as her husband was earning an income. This had the added effect of reducing the number of women in the workforce. One-quarter of the loan was cancelled on the birth of each child. The loan was said to be *abgekindert*, 'childed off'. Childless couples and single men paid more taxes to help fund this financial arrangement. On 12 August each year, the date of Hitler's mother's birthday, mothers were awarded the Mother's Cross (*Mutterkreuz*) – the bronze Mother's Cross for four children, the silver for six children, and the gold for eight or more children. Mothers wearing the gold cross were entitled to be saluted by the Hitler Youth.

Before marriage there were strict checks on the racial purity of the man and the woman, and after 1935 the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour* made it illegal for a German to marry a Jew.

Historians are unsure whether the policies to increase the birthrate were successful. The birthrate did increase from 14.7 births per thousand in 1933 (970 000 babies) to 20.4 births per thousand in 1939



SOURCE 4.7 Gold Cross of Honour for the German Mother, known as the Mother's Cross. The Gold Cross was awarded to mothers who had eight or more children.

(1 400 000 babies), but after 1939 the birthrate declined. Many believe that the increase in the birthrate reflected the end of the Depression and the peaceful years before 1939. During the 1930s the number of marriages increased, but the number of children per marriage did not. Despite all the attempts by the government, the average family in the 1930s remained a 'two-child' family.

Although the Nazi regime promoted the family as the core unit of society, the policies of the Nazi state in fact undermined the family unit. The Nazi focus on the young created tensions between the generations. Family unity was strained by the constant demands of the state, with family members involved with the Hitler Youth and the League of German Maidens, and an educational system that promoted ideas that often caused great tension between the child and the parents.

Lebensborn, ‘Giving a child to the Führer’

In Nazi Germany abortions were illegal, birth control was actively discouraged, family planning centres were closed, and the stigma associated with illegitimacy was lessened. In 1941 the production and distribution of contraceptives was banned.

Every pure German child was important and in 1936 the *Lebensborn* or Spring of Life program was introduced. Under the control of the SS and very much the initiative of its leader, Heinrich Himmler, special homes were set up to provide for unmarried mothers referred by party agencies or for women who fell pregnant to SS men outside of marriage. These institutions were reserved for racially pure German women. The slogan ‘giving a child to the Führer’ came into use, and the children born in *Lebensborn* homes

were usually fostered out to German couples. During the war the *Lebensborn* program was extended to include the removal of Nordic-looking children from orphanages and even from families in the conquered territories, and they were placed with German families.



Bundesarchiv/O. Ang

SOURCE 4.8 Maternity home of the *Lebensborn* organisation, with the SS flag overhead

stigma
Shame

THE GERMAN WORKERS

One of the first acts of the Nazis after they came to power was to break the power of the trade unions and organised labour. All German trade unions had been abolished in May 1933, their assets seized and their leaders imprisoned, and a new organisation, the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*), was set up to manage both employers and the working class. The main role of the German Labour Front was to educate and indoctrinate the workers to accept their

role in the new Germany. Although the Nazis could threaten the workers, the state could not function without them so there was an attempt to eliminate class barriers, creating a classless society and bringing the workers in as part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Workers had already lost their right to strike and for most of the 1930s working hours slowly increased and the government-restricted wage increased. In 1936 the average wage for a factory worker was 35 marks per week, well below the wage of the 1920s. As unemployment fell, and as the Nazis sought to rearm and carry out a greater degree of industrialisation during the mid-1930s, a labour shortage developed, particularly for skilled workers. It was only then that some improvement in wages began. The standard of living for the 15 million German workers slowly improved during the years 1933 to 1939, but it was not a dramatic improvement.

Strength Through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*, KdF)

The most significant attempt to win over the loyalty of the working class was the Strength Through Joy movement (*Kraft durch Freude*, KdF). Robert Ley, the Head of the Labour Front, calculated that the average German worker had 3740 hours of leisure time a year. The Nazis believed that this time had to be used productively and that if workers participated in organised leisure activities they would return with greater motivation to their daily work. The Nazis sought to manage leisure in order to improve work output.



SOURCE 4.9 Workers and their families enjoying team competitions as part of the Strength Through Joy program at the lakeside area of Wannsee near Berlin in 1935

to provide holiday cruises to Italy, Spain and the fjords of Norway. Reinforcing the concept of the national community, all passengers travelled in the same one-class accommodation.

Using money confiscated from the trade unions, the KdF was set up to provide leisure activities for the workers. The organisation planned theatre and concert outings, educational courses, sporting fixtures, and above all cheap subsidised holidays within Germany and beyond. Many Germans who had never taken a holiday could now afford to do so with the support of the state. In 1938 some 10 million German workers took a holiday trip and German tourism began to grow. In the same year almost 180 000 people went on Strength Through Joy sponsored cruises. The KdF purchased four ocean liners

The Volkswagen

In their quest to win the loyalty of the working class, the German Labour Front also financed the development of the Strength Through Joy Car, a name soon changed to 'the People's Car' (*Volkswagen*). Automobiles had been a status symbol, but the *Volkswagen* was to be a symbol of the new society in which the national community class barriers came down. Designed by Ferdinand Porsche, the People's Car was to be the car every German family could afford. Hitler, who had a great interest in cars, favoured the project. The first cars were produced in 1938, but the war broke out before mass production could begin.



SOURCE 4.10 Poster for the new Strength Through Joy Car (*Der KdF Wagen*) from 1936. The car was later called 'the People's Car' or *Volkswagen*.

RELIGION IN NAZI GERMANY

To many Germans, National Socialism was itself a religion, and the two main Christian denominations in Germany, the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholic Church, represented a rival system of beliefs: alternatives to the Nazi ideal of the national community. Hitler had nothing but contempt for Christianity, calling it the 'Jewish Christ creed with its effeminate pity ethics', but he understood the influence of the Christian churches and he moved cautiously in his dealings with them.

The Roman Catholic Church in Nazi Germany

In 1933 the Roman Catholic Church, anxious to protect the interests of the Church in Germany, came to an understanding with the Nazi regime. Despite his scorn for religion, Hitler was impressed by the authority and structure of the Catholic Church and saw political and diplomatic advantage in making some arrangement with it. In July 1933 a **concordat** was signed between the Third Reich and the **Holy See**. This concordat guaranteed the rights of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany, and in return the Church promised not to engage in political activity. One of the results was that the Catholic Centre Party, which had helped Hitler into power by its support for the Enabling Act, was dissolved.

As the Nazis moved to impose their beliefs on German society and eliminate Christian influences from German life, it was not long before the provisions of the concordat were violated. Restrictions were placed on Catholic schools, Catholic youth organisations were

concordat

A treaty or agreement signed between the Holy See and another nation and which deals with church or religious matters

Holy See

The Vatican City in Rome

gradually brought under the control of the Hitler Youth, priests and nuns were persecuted, the Catholic press was closed down, and religious instruction in schools was phased out. In March 1937 Pope Pius XI condemned the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in the *Reich* and called it 'illegal as it is inhuman'. During Easter services in 1937 his message was read in every Catholic church in Germany.

Protestant churches in Nazi Germany

The Nazis found it much easier to deal with the Protestant churches. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, they were not part of an international organisation, and there was a long tradition in the Protestant denominations of loyalty to the state and obedience to authority. Initially the Nazis sought to coordinate the activity of the Protestant churches by supporting an Evangelical Reich Church led by Pastor Ludwig Müller, who was appointed Protestant Bishop of the *Reich*.

This attempt by supporters of the regime to unify the Protestant churches caused deeper divisions and over 6000 Protestant clergy formed the Confessional Church. This group opposed the Nazis' attempt to control the Protestant faith and produced a number of leaders who, with great courage, spoke out against the regime. Among those who spoke out was Pastor Martin Niemöller, a former U-boat commander in the First World War. He was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen and later Dachau concentration camps from 1937 to 1945. Another who spoke out was the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was executed in 1945.

The Nazi state constantly sought to limit the influence of organised religion in Germany and many brave individuals who spoke out against the Nazis suffered as a consequence. But as institutions, the churches survived. They were critical of the loss of religious influence in society, but they remained, with few exceptions, passive and silent about the crimes committed by the regime and even about the persecution of other races and groups in society.

The racial state

Until the Nazis came to power, anti-Semitic feeling was less prominent in Germany than in the neighbouring countries of France and Austria and in Russia. In the liberal and democratic Weimar Republic, German Jews enjoyed equal rights with all other Germans, and many rose to senior positions in the civil service and the government.

Racism was the central, consistent theme of Nazism and in their struggle for power, the Nazis never concealed their hatred of the Jews. By Nazi definition, about 1 per cent or 500 000 of the German population were Jewish.

The Nazi movement embraced the earlier ideas of the *Völkisch* movement from the late 19th century. This was a collection of nationalist and racist groups of German philosophers, writers and artists who saw the Jewish influence as a challenge to German culture and the German nation. They saw the German nation as a community of pure Germans, and from this developed the idea that people who were not German needed to be excluded rather than assimilated.

By the start of the 20th century, this concept of a racially pure people came to embrace the concept of the pure Aryan race, of which the Jews were not a part. The famous German

historian Heinrich von Treitschke, writing in the 1880s, said, ‘Die Juden sind unser Unglück’ (‘The Jews are our misfortune’), a slogan the Nazis happily borrowed.

For Hitler, the Jew represented the absolute contrast to the Aryan. The fundamental duty of government, in Hitler’s mind, was to preserve the racial purity of the state, for only in this way could the superior race maintain its dominance over inferior races. Hitler also believed that the Jews were responsible for all the evils that had befallen Germany – defeat in war, revolution and economic collapse. Above all, they threatened Hitler’s vision of a pure national racial community.



SOURCE 4.11 Drawing from a children’s reading book of 1936. The contrasting image of how the Nazis presented the German Aryan and the Jewish people is made very clearly.

PRE-WAR TREATMENT OF THE JEWS

British historian Richard Overy has suggested that Nazi racial policy towards the Jews could be broken into four distinct phases, each phase progressively more extreme and radical.

1 Vilification

The deliberate attempt to revile the Jews. In this phase the Nazi propaganda machine played a decisive part. Its aim was to make Germans dislike and fear the Jews in Germany

2 Discrimination

The laws that were progressively passed depriving Jews of their rights including their right to be a German citizen

3 Separation

The progressive removal of Jews from the community and their ‘resettlement’ to the East

4 Extermination

The systematic killing of the Jews and others in extermination camps

SOURCE 4.12 Phases of Nazi racial policy towards Jews



PRE-WAR TREATMENT OF THE JEWS

1933	APRIL	<p>Boycott of Jewish businesses throughout the <i>Reich</i></p> <p>The <i>Law Against Overcrowding of German Schools</i> removed many Jewish students from schools; all Jews were finally expelled from German schools in 1938</p> <p>The <i>Law for the Restoration of a Professional Public Service</i> led to the removal of Jews from positions in the government</p> <p>An 'Aryans only' policy was adopted in German sporting clubs</p>
1933	SEPTEMBER	The Reich Chamber of Culture was established; Jews were gradually excluded from the cultural life of the nation
1935	MAY	The <i>Military Service Act</i> ; 'Aryan descent' became a prerequisite for military service
	SEPTEMBER	The Nuremberg Laws were announced: The <i>Reich Citizenship Law</i> and the <i>Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour</i>
	NOVEMBER	The first decrees under the Nuremberg Laws removed the right of German Jews to hold German citizenship and to marry Germans of non-Jewish background
1936	AUGUST	The Olympic Games were held in Berlin; anti-Semitic activity was deliberately reduced for the duration of the Games
1937	JUNE	Secret directives from SS leader Heydrich provided for 'protective custody' for all 'defilers of race'
1938	APRIL	The process of excluding Jews from economic life began; all Jewish wealth exceeding 5000 marks had to be registered
	JUNE	In the 'June Action' 1500 Jews with any police record (including traffic violations) were arrested and sent to concentration camps
	JULY	All Jewish doctors were removed from the medical register and were only permitted to treat Jewish patients
	AUGUST	All Jewish businesses had to be registered
	SEPTEMBER	All Jewish lawyers were deprived of their right to work
		All Jews were required to add the names 'Sarah' (or 'Sara') or 'Israel' to their names
	OCTOBER	All Jews were required to have the letter 'J' stamped in red in their passports
	NOVEMBER	<p><i>Kristallnacht</i> (Night of Broken Glass): the destruction of Jewish synagogues and property across much of Germany; 20 000 male Jews were arrested; the Jewish community was fined one billion Reichsmarks and was required to pay for the cost of the destruction (30 billion Reichsmarks)</p> <p>New regulations excluded the Jewish population from theatres, concert halls, cinemas, parks, swimming pools, restaurants and holiday resorts; Jewish children were totally excluded from German schools; restrictions were placed on the ownership of pets by Jews</p>
	DECEMBER	The 'Aryanisation' or takeover of all Jewish businesses
1939	JANUARY	Jews were required to surrender their driver's licences and they were not permitted to travel in certain zones of major cities
	SEPTEMBER	<p>The outbreak of the Second World War</p> <p>Jews were forbidden to appear out of doors after 8 p.m.</p> <p>Jews were forbidden to own wireless sets</p>

Jews are deprived of basic rights

The start of direct action against German Jews came only weeks after the Nazis came to power. On 1 April 1933, the government approved a **boycott** of Jewish businesses, shops and the offices of Jewish professional people. SA men painted slogans on Jewish businesses and prevented Germans from entering Jewish shops. This act marked the beginning of a series of new laws and regulations aimed at the Jews. From April 1933, Jews could no longer work for the government as the *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* restricted employment in the civil service to 'people of Aryan descent'. Jewish government workers, including teachers in public schools and universities, were fired.

Between 1933 and 1935, laws were passed that removed Jews not only from the civil service and from education, but also from the health and legal systems. In April 1933 the *Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools* restricted the number of Jewish children who could attend government schools.

In September the *Hereditary Farm Law* banned Jews from owning farmland. When Goebbels took control of the Reich Chamber of Culture, Jews were expelled from the artistic and cultural life of the nation. Jews were removed from elite sporting teams and forbidden to represent Germany in international competition.

The Nazi leadership was moving cautiously, aware of international criticism and the possibility that the harassment might get out of hand. There is also evidence that many middle-class Germans did not approve of the new policies against the Jews. Anti-Semitic feeling was far more intense in the villages and small towns than in the major cities.

The campaign against the Jews reached a new level with the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. The main purpose of these laws was to isolate the Jews as a separate group in German society. The two laws were announced at the annual party rally at Nuremberg. The first forbade marriage between Germans and Jews, and the second deprived all German Jews of their citizenship. In a subsequent law, in November 1935, the government defined what was meant by the term 'Jew'. Jews were identified not by religion, but by the blood of their grandparents. 'A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews ... a Jew is also one who is descended from two full Jewish parents.'

boycott

A refusal to deal with or trade with a particular person or organisation



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

SOURCE 4.13 German civilian wearing a Nazi armband holds anti-Jewish posters while SA members paste them across the windows of Jewish business in April 1933. Most of the signs read, 'Germans defend yourself against Jewish atrocity propaganda. Buy only at German stores'.

The Nuremberg Laws

The Nuremberg Laws, proclaimed in September 1935, were developed by the Nazi Party to formalise the distinction between Jews and non-Jews in German society.

Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour, 15 September 1935

Entirely convinced that the purity of the German blood is essential to the further existence of the German people and inspired by the uncompromising determination to safeguard the future of the German nation, the Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Section 1: Marriages between Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood are forbidden.

Section 2: Sexual relations outside marriage between Jews and nationals of German or kindred blood are forbidden.

Section 3: Jews shall not employ female citizens of German or kindred blood as domestic servants.

Reich Citizenship Law, 15 September 1935

Article 2: A citizen of the Reich is that subject who is of German or kindred blood ... The right to citizenship is acquired by the granting of Reich citizenship papers.

J Noakes & G Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, pp. 463–5.

Questions

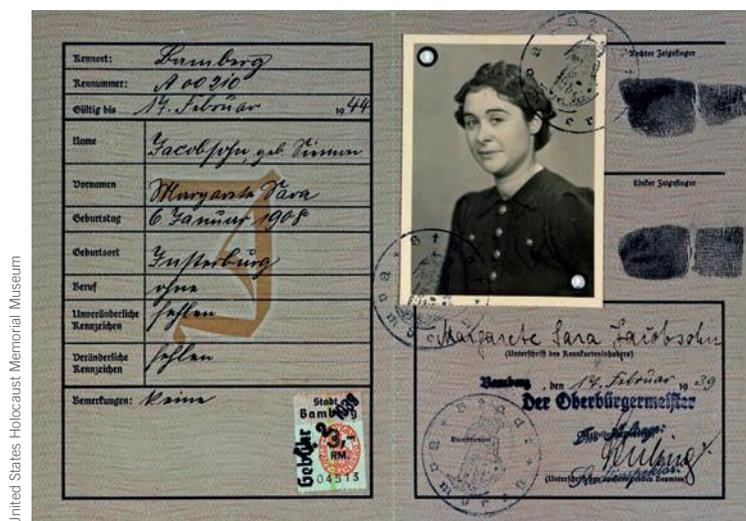
- 1 Explain what the Nazis were seeking to achieve by the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.
- 2 Can you offer a reason why the Nazis were determined to deprive Jews of German citizenship?

The persecution increases

In the summer of 1936 during the Olympic Games held in Berlin, the campaign against the Jews was reduced. Posters and anti-Jewish signs came down and the propaganda ceased for

the duration of the Games. The Nazis even made some concessions and permitted a few Jewish athletes to take part in the Games.

In 1937, however, the campaign resumed with even greater ferocity. The attacks on the Jews were no longer the work of the SA and the SS; they now became legitimised by the state. Jews were forced from German economic life. All Jewish businesses had to be registered and many were seized as the government



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

SOURCE 4.14 Identity card issued to Margarete Sara Jacobsohn and stamped with a red letter J for 'Jude' (Jew). According to the law this person has included 'Sara' in her name.

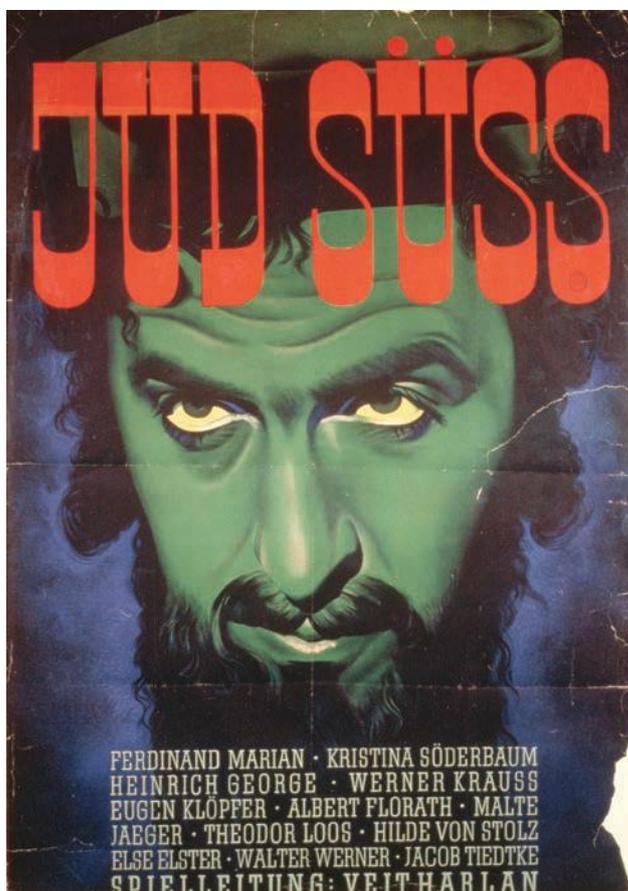
followed a policy of ‘Aryanisation’ of economic life. New regulations prevented Jews from entering theatres, restaurants, public parks and holiday resorts. Jews were required to have special identity papers and to have a red ‘J’ stamped on their passport. Jewish doctors could no longer treat German patients, and a law issued in August 1938 required Jews to add ‘Israel’ (for men) and ‘Sara’ or ‘Sarah’ (for women) to their middle names. Signs began to appear in shops and towns saying that ‘Jews are not wanted here’ and ‘The Jews are our misfortune’.

The role of propaganda

The Propaganda Ministry produced a constant flow of anti-Semitic material intended to influence average German citizens in their attitude towards the Jewish people. The Jews became the target for venting national frustrations, and propaganda

presented them as traitors to the country and in partnership with Bolshevik Russia, the other great enemy of the German people. The Jews were blamed for Germany’s military defeat of 1918 and for the economic hardship of the Weimar years. Above all, they were depicted as a race that threatened the unity and racial purity of the national community. Goebbels was violently anti-Semitic and took a personal interest in the production of a number of anti-Semitic films for cinema audiences. *Jud Süß* (1940), set in the 18th century, told the story of the Jewish villain Süß, who, after seducing a German maiden and torturing her fiancé, is finally hanged by the outraged German townsfolk. A documentary film, *The Eternal Jew* (1940), produced on Hitler’s orders, horrified many Germans as Jews were depicted as rats. The commentary that accompanied the film was equally violent.

Another source of attack were anti-Semitic publications, the most significant being *Der Stürmer* (*The Attacker*) published each week by Julius Streicher, the Nazi *Gauleiter* of Nuremberg. It was published from 1923 until 1945 and each edition had graphic drawings and was full of sensational stories, many with sexual undertones. Its circulation in the 1930s was over 700 000. Hitler himself enjoyed *Der Stürmer* and admitted that it was the only newspaper he read from cover to cover. *Der Stürmer* also produced anti-Semitic material for children, including a school reading book for children entitled *The Poisonous Mushroom* (1938).



SOURCE 4.15 Poster of the anti-Semitic film *Jud Süß*, 1940

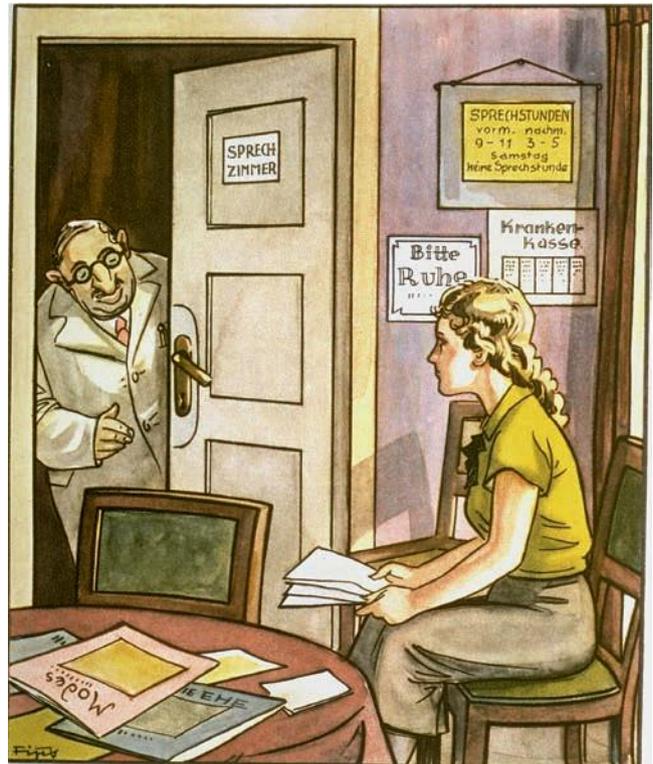
From the children's schoolbook *The Poisonous Mushroom* (1938)

Inge sits in the Jew doctor's reception room. She has to wait a long time ... again and again she remembers her talk with her mother. And again and again her mind dwells on the warning of her BDM* leader: 'A German must not consult a Jew doctor! And particularly not a German girl!'

After entering the waiting room, Inge had an extraordinary experience. From the doctor's consulting room she could hear the sound of crying. She heard the voice of a young girl, 'Doctor, doctor, leave me alone!' ...

Inge has now been waiting for an hour. She takes up the magazines again and tries to read. The door opens. Inge looks up. There stands the Jew. She screams. She's so frightened she drops the magazines. She jumps up in terror. Her eyes stare into the Jewish doctor's face. His face is the face of the devil. In the middle of his devil's face is a huge crooked nose. Behind the spectacles two criminal eyes. And the thick lips are grinning. A grin that says 'Now I've got you at last, little German girl!'

The Jew approaches her. His fleshy fingers stretch out for her. But now Inge has recovered her wits. Before the Jew can grab hold of her, she slaps the Jew doctor's fat face. Then a jump to the door and Inge runs breathlessly down the stairs.



SOURCE 4.16 Illustration from *The Poisonous Mushroom*

* *Bund Deutscher Mädel*

J Noakes & G Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 470.

Questions

- 1 What impact were publications like *The Poisonous Mushroom* intended to have on German children?
- 2 Explain how such propaganda achieved its impact and effect.

Historical research suggests that the constant propaganda onslaught led to a great number of Germans accepting the Nazi persecution of the Jews.

Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass)

On 9 November 1938, in response to the murder of a Nazi diplomat in Paris by a Jewish student, the Nazis launched a systematic attack on Jews in Germany. In what came to be called *Kristallnacht*, after the glass that littered German streets the next morning, SA and SS troops in plain clothes and with the approval of the Nazi leadership, systematically smashed and burnt Jewish property across the country.

Kristallnacht was the most violent outburst against the Jews in Germany before the start of the war. More than 90 people were killed, almost 1000 Jewish shops and businesses were looted, and 191 synagogues were burnt down. During the next few days the Nazis rounded up more than 20 000 Jewish men and boys and sent them to concentration camps. The Jewish community was made to pay 30 million Reichsmarks for the cost of the destruction, as well as a fine of one billion Reichsmarks.

Kristallnacht was initiated by Goebbels with Hitler's approval. It was, in this sense, an example of the concept of 'working towards the *Führer*'; that is, Nazi officials interpreting the will of the *Führer* and carrying out initiatives of which he would most certainly approve.

As the persecution of the Jews increased during the 1930s, the Nazis encouraged Jews to leave the country. Between 1933 and 1939, when emigration was stopped, 250 000 German Jews emigrated, mainly to Palestine, the United States, Latin America and the Eastern European states. Many of those who moved to the countries of Eastern Europe (such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary) and other occupied countries, such as France, Belgium and Holland, would later fall



SOURCE 4.17 Front cover of the anti-Semitic newspaper, *Der Stürmer*, from May 1934. Like most issues of *Der Stürmer*, this issue features a cartoon and the footer 'The Jews are our misfortune'.



SOURCE 4.18 Berlin street after Nazi groups attacked Jewish shops and property during *Kristallnacht*, the Night of Broken Glass, November 1938

victim to the Nazis when the war began. Some countries, including Britain, France and later the United States, severely restricted the number of Jews who could enter the country.

PRESERVING RACIAL PURITY

The Nazi obsession with creating and preserving the pure racial state led to the attack not only on what the Nazis saw as inferior races such as the Jews, but also on what they regarded as inferior peoples of their own race. As racial policy developed, there was no place in the new Germany for Jews or for particular minority groups who could endanger the racial strength of the nation. The first victims of German racial obsession were Germans themselves, individuals thought to be hereditarily unfit, the mentally ill and people regarded as anti-social.

Eugenics

The Nazis believed in eugenics, the idea of improving a race by selective breeding. This concept had been around since the 19th century and Germany was not the only nation to embrace it. However, with the power of the totalitarian state, the Nazis took the concept to new levels. They saw the German people (the *Volk*) as one biological body. To preserve the health of the *Volk*, the Nazis introduced a policy of forced sterilisation of men and women who had particular diseases or physical handicaps. The aim was to prevent these people with so-called 'bad genes' from having children and to eliminate weaknesses that could be passed on to the next generation. Under a law introduced in July 1933, doctors were required to report patients who had any of the conditions that made them eligible for forced sterilisation. Among the conditions listed in the law was 'feeble-mindedness', a condition that could be interpreted in many ways. Between 1934 and the end of the war 350 000 people were sterilised.

Institutionalising eugenics

Law for the Protection of Heredity Health, 14 July 1933

Article 1: Anyone who suffers from an inheritable disease may be sterilised surgically if, in the judgment of medical science, it could be expected that descendants will suffer from serious inherited mental or physical defects.

Article 2: Anyone who suffers from one of the following is to be regarded as inheritably diseased within the meaning of this law: Congenital feeble-mindedness, schizophrenia, manic-depression, epilepsy, hereditary blindness, hereditary deafness, serious inheritable malformations.

Reichsgesetzblatt, Vol. 1, 86, 25 July 1933.

In L Snyder (ed), *Hitler's Third Reich: A documentary history*, Nelson Hall, Chicago, 1981, p. 132.

Question

How does this law of July 1933 fit with what you know of the Nazi concept of race?

Treatment of the mentally ill

The brutality of the racial state is also revealed in the treatment of people in Germany who were mentally ill or seriously handicapped. Between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis killed such people, a crime carried out amid secrecy and deception. People in institutions and hospitals who were

certified unfit by a specially selected team of doctors were killed simply because their continued survival was considered not to be in the interests of the nation.

The program was ordered by Hitler and began in October 1939 with the killing of 5000 mentally and physically handicapped children. The secret operation was code-named T4, a reference to the street address of the planning headquarters in Berlin, *Tiergartenstraße 4*. Once the war began in 1939, people were collected from institutions and transported to one of six special facilities across the country, where they were killed using pure carbon monoxide gas. The bodies were immediately cremated, fake death certificates were issued, and a standard letter of sympathy was sent to the relatives.

The sudden death of thousands of people in institutions, whose death certificates listed similar causes (normally influenza or pneumonia), began to raise suspicions. By 1941 news of the 'euthanasia' program had leaked out. Cardinal Clemens von Galen, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Munster, made it a public issue when he denounced the program in a series of sermons.

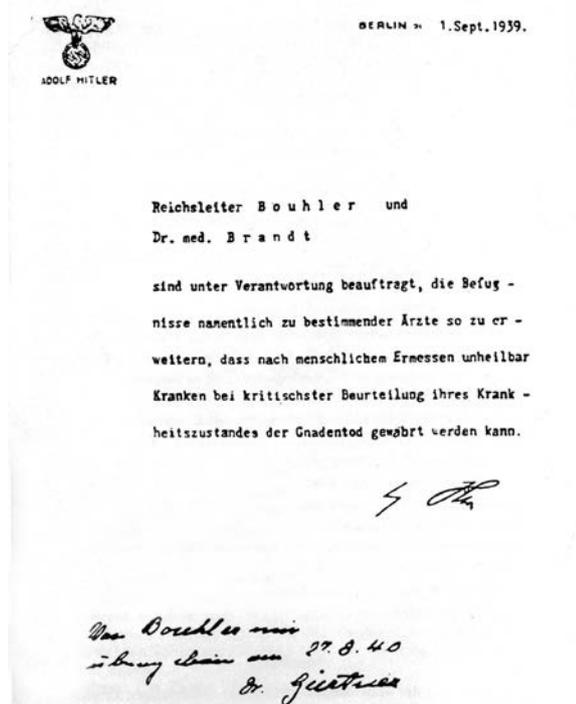
Cardinal Galen's very public protest caused Hitler to cancel the euthanasia program in August 1941. It was one of the very few examples of Nazi policy being influenced by public protest. By this time, however, about 100 000 Germans who were physically or mentally impaired had been killed.

In August 1942 the killings secretly resumed. Victims were no longer murdered by gassing, but instead were killed by lethal injection or drug overdose at a number of medical clinics throughout Germany. The total number of mentally ill or handicapped people killed by 1945 was 275 000.

euthanasia

Ending life in order to relieve a person from pain or suffering

Hitler authorises euthanasia program



Translation

Reichsleiter Bouhler and Dr Brandt are charged with the responsibility of extending the authority of certain doctors, to be designated by name in such a manner that persons, who, according to human judgment, are incurably sick, can, on the most careful diagnosis of their condition of sickness, be accorded a mercy death.

Signed
Adolf Hitler

SOURCE 4.19 Hitler's order written on his own private letter paper authorising the euthanasia program

continued

continued

A letter of sympathy on the death of a handicapped person, 1940

Dear ...

As you are no doubt aware, your daughter Fräulein ... was transferred to our institution on ministerial orders. It is our sad duty to have to inform you that she died here on ... of influenza. All attempts by the doctors to keep the patient alive were unfortunately unsuccessful.

We wish to express our most heartfelt condolences for your loss and hope that you will find comfort in the knowledge that the death of your daughter has released her from her great and incurable suffering.

In accordance with police instructions we were obliged to cremate the corpse immediately. If you wish the urn to be sent to you – without cost – then please inform us.

E Kogon, et al, *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas*, Frankfurt, 1983, p. 50.

Questions

- 1 How does the program of euthanasia relate to Nazi racial policy?
- 2 What do the gaps following 'Dear' ..., 'your daughter Fräulein ...' and 'here on ...' in the letter of sympathy suggest about the nature of the euthanasia campaign?
- 3 The euthanasia policy was cancelled following protests in 1941. Undertake research to find out why there were protests and why this campaign was successful.

The Romani

The Nazis also regarded Romani, or gypsies, as *Untermenschen* (subhumans). They were disliked because they were not racially German, and they were also seen as anti-social and unproductive because of their unsettled lifestyle. In this way, they challenged the Nazi idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* or national community. In 1939 about a million Romani lived in Europe, with about 30 000 in Germany, and another 500 000 in Eastern Europe, especially in Russia and Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In 1940 all Romani in Germany were deported to the newly opened camps in Poland. Romani from other areas conquered by the Nazis were also moved to these camps. By the end of the war more than 200 000 of Europe's Romani had been killed.

Homosexuals

The Nazis introduced severe measures against homosexual men who were also seen as a threat to the racial community. Under the Criminal Codes of the Imperial and Weimar periods homosexuality was illegal. When it came to power, the Nazi Party continued to enforce these laws and some 100 000 men were arrested and 15 000 were sent to concentration camps. A special section within the *Gestapo* investigated men who were thought to be homosexual, lists were drawn up, informers were encouraged, and the number of arrests increased. Within the SS, Himmler decreed the death penalty for any SS member who was homosexual. The vast majority of homosexual victims were males; females were not subjected to systematic persecution. The death rate among this group in the concentration camps was very high, about 60 per cent. One reason for this was that homosexuals were required to wear a pink triangle on their prison clothing and they were singled out by guards and inmates alike because of the widespread prejudice against homosexuals.

Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945)

In March 1933, a few weeks after he came to power, Hitler approved the establishment of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda to be led by Dr Joseph Goebbels, the most intellectual of the top Nazi leadership. Elegant, charming and ruthless, he understood the value of propaganda and the psychology behind its effective use.

Paul Joseph Goebbels was born in the Rhineland in 1897. A deformed right foot had excluded him from military service in the First World War so he had both the time and the opportunity to complete his university studies, gaining his Doctorate in Philosophy when he was 25. In his early years he had suffered from a sense of inferiority, which in turn produced a driving ambition and the need to demonstrate achievement.

Goebbels joined the small Nazi Party in 1924, attracted by its nationalist vision and its anti-Semitism. There his talents, his organising ability, his sharp intellect, his efficiency and his ability as a speaker and propagandist were quickly recognised. He met Hitler for the first time in 1925 and quickly fell under his spell.



akg-images/ulstein bild



From the diary of Joseph Goebbels, 1925–26

2 November 1925

There he is. Shakes my hand like an old friend. And those big blue eyes, like stars. He is glad to see me. I am in heaven ... that man has got everything to be king.

23 November 1925

My joy is great. He speaks to us all evening. I can't hear enough of it. He gives me his picture with a greeting to the Rhineland inscribed 'Heil Hitler'. I would love to have Hitler as my friend. His picture stands on my table. I could not bear to have to doubt that man.

19 April 1926

I believe he has taken me to his heart like no one else. Adolf Hitler I love you because you are both great and simple at the same time. What one calls a genius.

L Lochner (trans), *The Goebbels Diaries*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1948.

Questions

- 1 What evidence in these diary entries helps to explain Goebbels' fanatical loyalty to Hitler?
- 2 What do you think Goebbels meant by the observation that Hitler was 'both great and simple'?

Joseph Goebbels on the aim of propaganda, March 1933

It is not enough for people to be more or less reconciled to our regime, to be persuaded to adopt a neutral attitude towards us. Rather we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us ... the new Ministry has no other aim than to unite the nation behind the ideal of the national revolution ... It must be our task to instil into these propaganda facilities a modern feeling. Technology must not be allowed to proceed ahead of the Reich, the Reich must go along with technology ... We are living in an age where the masses must support policies ... It is the task of state propaganda to simplify complicated ways of thinking so that even the smallest man in the street may understand.

J Noakes & G Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 334.

Questions

- 1 What did Goebbels see as the aim of propaganda in the Nazi state?
- 2 Explain what Goebbels meant by the remark that ‘Technology must not be allowed to proceed ahead of the Reich’.
- 3 Explain how propaganda had to be presented to the average German citizen.



In 1926 Goebbels was appointed the Nazi Party leader or *Gauleiter* for the city of Berlin. At the time Berlin was a stronghold of the German Communist Party and Goebbels effectively established the Nazi Party presence in this city. He used provocative tactics such as deliberate Nazi parades into communist strongholds, which provoked street fighting and violence. Two years later he was elected a member of the *Reichstag* and was also appointed to control the propaganda department of the party. Goebbels played a major role in the Nazi Party struggle for power and was a relentless presence as he promoted the Nazi cause and hammered its political opponents.

The Propaganda Ministry, situated in Berlin opposite Hitler's Chancellery, developed into a huge organisation. It controlled the German newspapers, radio and film, and through the Reich Chamber of Culture, established in September 1933 as part of the Propaganda Ministry, it extended its control to German music, theatre, writing, art, architecture, literature and even sport. Another section of the Propaganda Ministry was the Central Propaganda Office of the Nazi Party itself, responsible for the constant promotion of the regime through the great displays, rallies and the special ceremonies associated with the Nazi movement. As Minister, Goebbels controlled the Propaganda Ministry and he was also President of the Reich Chamber of Culture and Director of the Nazi Party Propaganda Office.

Goebbels and wartime propaganda

Just as Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry had been so important in helping the Nazis to consolidate their hold over the German people during the years of peace, so it became a vital element of German life in the years of war (1939–45).

In the early years of the war, when Germany was victorious, propaganda was used to promote the theme of German invincibility and greatness. Above all, it was used to

continued

continued

reinforce the idea of the *Führer* myth, with Hitler projected as the great military leader and strategist. ‘There he stands,’ Goebbels wrote, ‘planning the future. Utterly great and utterly lonely building a new Reich and providing for the future of the German people.’³ Propaganda took the form of newsreels and reports from the fronts. Goebbels did not find the task too difficult in the early years of the war, because the victories spoke for themselves. It was relatively easy to maintain German morale with the great military victories in 1939 and 1940.

However, as the war situation turned against Germany from 1943 and the army faced defeat, the propaganda themes changed. Everyone was urged to work hard for victory. He called for total war and the full mobilisation of the people. The enemy was Bolshevism, and the war was now depicted as a struggle by the German people to protect European civilisation from the barbarian hordes advancing from the East.

To the very end Goebbels remained committed and loyal to the Nazi state, his faith and devotion to Hitler was never questioned. During the war, when Hitler refused to visit the bombed-out cities, Goebbels assumed an even greater prominence as he fought to maintain German morale and rally the people with constant visits and speeches.

In the closing days of the war he moved his family into Hitler’s **bunker** where, after Hitler’s death, he and his wife Magda took their own lives after arranging for the murder of their six children.



Bundesarchiv/O. Ang

SOURCE 4.20 Joseph and Magda Goebbels with their six children in 1942. Harald Quandt, Magna’s son by an earlier marriage completes the family portrait.

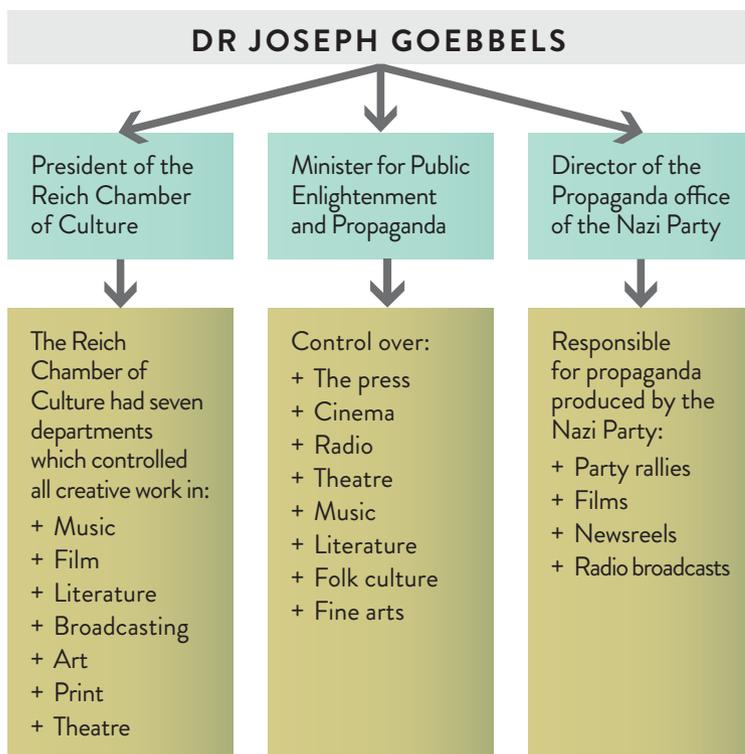
Propaganda in Nazi Germany

In the totalitarian state, propaganda was intended to control all communication and expression and to define the cultural and social life of the nation. It set out to constantly reinforce the ideology of National Socialism so that Germans would accept the philosophy of the party. This included defining the Jews as the enemy of the state and promoting the vision of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. It constantly promoted the achievements of the regime and a particular image of the leader, represented by the slogan *Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer* (One Nation, One People, One Leader).

This total control was possible because, like Hitler, Goebbels was interested in technology. The Nazis were the first to use the latest technology skillfully, including radio and the moving image, to convey the message and image of the regime and to control all forms of expression. In this sense propaganda was one of the factors that defined the nature of the Nazi state.

bunker

A heavily protected underground shelter



SOURCE 4.21 The world of Joseph Goebbels

CREATING THE HITLER IMAGE

After the Nazis came to power there was a deliberate and persistent effort to promote Hitler as the heroic leader of the German people. The creation of this so-called *Führer* myth, how the Germans perceived Hitler, was the work of the Nazis themselves and in particular the Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels.

In the controlled mass media and in deliberate and structured images of the *Führer*, Hitler was projected as the leader chosen by fate to lead the German people. The image of the leader was not that of just another politician; it was of a true national leader, the man for whom the nation had been waiting. Goebbels focused on themes that had a natural appeal to middle-class Germans. Hitler was projected as a leader who was both moderate and reasonable, and a man who put the national good before his own interests.

There were a number of important factors that assisted in the creation of this powerful Hitler myth. In the first place it was helped by Germany's past tradition of heroic leaders, including Frederick the Great who had created the modern Prussian state in the 18th century, and Bismarck who had created the unified German nation (the Second Reich) in the 19th century. After the humiliation of defeat in the First World War and the instability and division that followed, the situation was ripe for a new leader who would come from the people. He would unite the nation with strong leadership and he would be ruthless towards the enemies of the state. These ideas, which were common in right-wing nationalistic circles, came to be embraced by middle-class Germans. Hitler was the beneficiary of this tradition.

Goebbels deliberately set out to create the Hitler myth through his mastery of the new techniques of mass propaganda. He created a bond between the *Führer* and his people that grew in the years of victory and endured in large measure until the collapse of the regime in 1945. For much of his time as the leader of Germany there was genuine and significant popular support for Hitler, and this support and mass appeal helped to maintain the Nazi regime. When there were difficulties and



SOURCE 4.22 Postcard entitled *Ein Kinderblick*, 'A child's glance', the type of image of Hitler favoured by the Propaganda Ministry. Postcards and posters depicting such images were mass-produced both for the German public and for outside Germany.

failings in government, Hitler was always seen as above these and certainly not the cause of them. Failings were the fault of officials, lesser people, not the *Führer*.

The final element in the Hitler image was that he was the inspiration behind the success that Germany was beginning to experience. In the mid-1930s there were very real successes. The German economy revived, unemployment fell, agriculture recovered and the German middle class did well. Even some sections of the German working class who had never fully supported the regime were won over as their standard of living improved. In foreign policy there were more successes. The Treaty of Versailles was ignored, Germany rearmed itself, German territory was regained, and in 1940 came the greatest of all successes, the military defeat of France in a mere six weeks. All of this was put forward as the result of the *Führer's* will and inspired leadership. With the persistent onslaught of propaganda, it was hard for the doubters to doubt.

CELEBRATION – THE NAZI CALENDAR

Daily life in Germany was changed by a new calendar of annual events for special celebration by the German people. This series of annual events reinforced the interpretation that Nazism was a form of political religion. Highlights of each year included the *Führer's* birthday in April, Mothering Day on 12 August (the date of Hitler's mother's birthday and honouring all German mothers), and the annual celebration of the Nazi Party *Reichsparteitag*, at its party rally held every September in the city of Nuremberg.

TABLE 4.1 Days of celebration in the calendar of the Third Reich

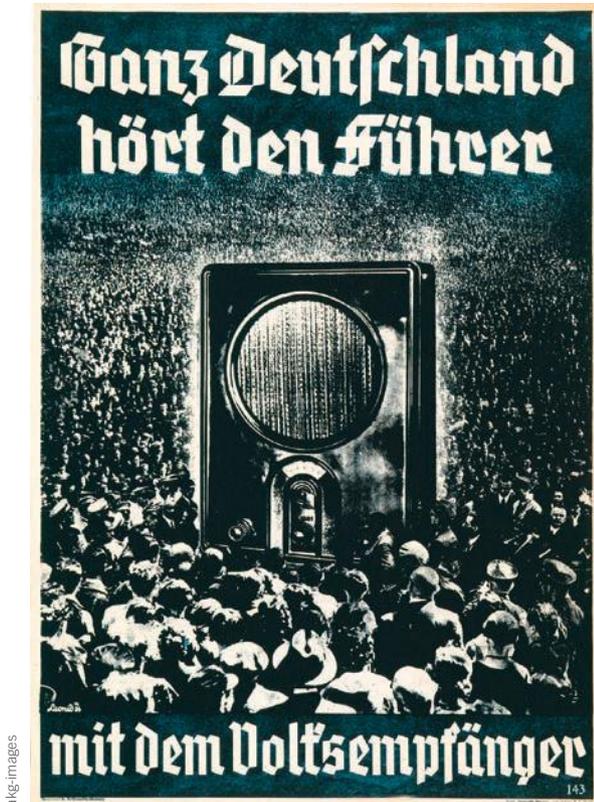
30 January	The Day of National Revival, celebrating Hitler's coming to power
24 February	Foundation Day of the NSDAP
16 March	Heroes' Remembrance Day, a day to remember the war dead
20 April	The <i>Führer's</i> Birthday
1 May	National Labour Day
21 June	Celebration of the Summer Solstice
12 August	Mothering Day
September	The Nuremberg Party Rally, a 3–5 day celebration of the Nazi Party
October	Autumn Harvest Thanksgiving, to pay tribute to German farmers
9 November	Anniversary of the 1923 Munich <i>Putsch</i>
21 December	Celebration of the Winter Solstice (which was intended to replace Christmas)

THE PRESS

Goebbels believed that the role of the press in Nazi Germany was not only to inform, but also to instruct. Control over the print media was achieved very quickly. The Editorial Law of October 1933 required newspaper editors to follow government policy, and all journalists and others who worked in the print media in Germany had to be registered and members of the Reich Press Chamber (part of the Reich Chamber of Culture). Independent news agencies were abolished and all news stories in Germany were issued through one outlet, the German News Bureau (*Deutsche Nachrichtenbüro*, DNB), which was part of the Propaganda Ministry. This news bureau issued the stories the newspapers could print. Newspapers that displeased the government were simply closed down.

Radio as an instrument of propaganda

Source A: The People's Radio



SOURCE 4.23 Poster for the Peoples' Radio, 'All Germany listens to the *Führer* with the Peoples' Radio'



SOURCE 4.24 An earlier model of the People's Radio of 1933 now preserved in the German Historical Museum (*Deutsches Historisches Museum*), Berlin. The radio sets were mass-produced and very affordable.

Source B: Radio as an instrument of propaganda

Goebbels instructs his staff, March 1933:

I consider radio to be the most modern and most crucial instrument that exists for influencing the masses ...
 First principle: At all costs avoid being boring. I put that before everything ... you must use your imagination
 ... bring to the masses the new attitude in a way which is modern, up to date, interesting, and appealing:
 interesting, instructive, but not schoolmasterish.

Quoted in J Laver, *Nazi Germany 1933–1945*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1991, p. 25.

Questions

- 1 Why did Goebbels have such a high opinion of the value of radio?
- 2 What, according to Goebbels, must be avoided when using the radio as an instrument of propaganda?

RADIO

Goebbels understood the enormous influence of broadcasting, and the radio became one of the most important mediums for propaganda. To ensure that all Germans had a radio set, the state produced the People's Radio (*Volksempfänger*), which was effective and very affordable. It also lacked the strength to pick up broadcasts from other countries. 'With this instrument,' Goebbels once observed, 'you make public opinion.'

Home ownership of radios increased dramatically, from one million in 1933 to more than nine million by 1938. All of Hitler's speeches and the party rallies were broadcast to the German people, and by 1935 the radio audience in the country numbered 56 million. Communal listening was encouraged. The idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the People's Community, was a consistent theme of Nazi propaganda in factories, flats, offices and public places.

Goebbels was also intelligent enough to realise that too much direct propaganda had a negative effect, and that the best results were achieved by indirect methods in programs of popular entertainment and music.

FILM

Like Hitler, Goebbels had a particular love of films, and he understood their value as propaganda and their power to influence the people. The German film industry was not taken over by the state, but it was subject to control from the Propaganda Ministry. From 1933 all German filmmakers were required to join the Reich Chamber of Film, and under the *Reich Motion Picture Law* (1937) the subject matter of all films had to be approved, and all employees in the industry had to take an oath of loyalty to Hitler. In the 1930s the film industry, despite the controls, was very productive, with state-of-the-art facilities at the huge film studios at Babelsberg near Berlin.

Initially a number of feature films were made that were blatant propaganda. These included *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933), a film about a boy from the Hitler Youth who dies for the *Führer*, and *Hans Westmar* (1934), a film glorifying the life of Horst Wessel, a member of the SA who was killed in a street brawl with communists.

Goebbels disliked these types of films because he realised that propaganda became ineffective the moment people became aware of it. He believed that the best propaganda films were those that entertained and conveyed the message in a more indirect way. Many of these films took the form of historical dramas about Germany's heroic past and heroic figures, with the clear message that the past had parallels with the present. In a film about heroic figures – for example, Frederick the Great – the German audiences could soon identify their present leader with this great German leader of the past.

The cinema, like the radio, was also used to promote Hitler. Goebbels preferred Hitler to appear in brief films and newsreels. These were produced with great care, with Hitler's appearances on film carefully stage-managed and edited to project the image of the leader as the man apart, who had sacrificed himself for the good of the nation. They concentrated on emotion rather than facts and were an essential element in the creation of the Hitler myth.

The Nuremberg Party rallies

Each year from 1923 to 1938, the Nazi Party conducted a party rally. From 1933 the rally was held in the city of Nuremberg. Entitled the *Reichsparteitag* 'the National Day of the Party', it was in fact a three- to five-day celebration and the major propaganda event conducted by the state. It was intended to reflect the unity and will of the German people, their bond with their leader, and the success of the nation. During these days of celebration there were parades and speeches by the Nazi leadership and special events for the German army (the *Wehrmacht*), the SS, the Hitler Youth and the German Labour Front.



Corbis

SOURCE 4.25 Hitler attending a ceremony at the Luitpold arena in Nuremberg as part of the 1934 rally



SOURCE 4.26 The Luitpold arena today, restored as a park for the people of Nuremberg

Cultural life in the Third Reich

In the 1920s the free and tolerant environment of the Weimar Republic had given rise to a flourishing and creative cultural life. Before the Nazis came to power, modernism, a development from the period after the First World War, was the dominant influence in German art, music and literature.

Hitler and the Nazi leadership despised intellectuals and the cultural activities of the 1920s and, after the Nazis came to power, the creative expression of Germany's writers, artists, musicians, intellectuals and others was restricted as the regime sought to define a new cultural life for Germany and to bring it under the control of the state. The National Socialist policy for the creative arts was designed to create a new German cultural heritage that reflected the ideology of the Nazi state. Goebbels was in charge of the Reich Chamber of Culture, which had seven specialised departments for each of the major areas of cultural expression – literature, the press, broadcasting, theatre, music, art and film. As part of *Gleichschaltung*, German cultural life was to be controlled.

LITERATURE

The Nazi regime under the Reich Chamber of Literature maintained a close control over what could be published and read in the Third Reich. The Nazis removed books that they deemed 'un-German'. Not surprisingly, many authors left Germany rather than face such controls over their creative work.

In May 1933 students and young people across Germany staged massive burnings of books regarded as 'un-German'. These included Jewish authors, books that expressed liberal or socialist views, books with pacifist themes and communist publications. In Berlin alone, in a huge bonfire in the square beside Berlin University, 20 000 books were burnt.



Corbis/Austrian Archives

SOURCE 4.27 Books unacceptable to the Nazi regime were burnt by students and members of the SA on 10 May 1933 in the Opera Square in Berlin.

Burning 'un-German' books, May 1933



Corbis/Luther Steiner

SOURCE 4.28 The memorial in Berlin today marks the spot where the books were burnt in May 1933. The memorial takes the form of illuminated empty library shelves below the ground.)

Gutjahr, in a Nazi uniform, made a speech. He and his fellows had gathered, he said, to consign to the flames 'un-German' books that threatened to disintegrate the national movement. They took joy in it. Henceforth there must be purity in German literature.

Berlin May 10

Probably 40 000 persons assembled in the great square between the Opera House and the university and stood in a drizzle to watch the show. Perhaps as many more gathered along the five miles of street through which the torch bearing parade of students escorted the borrowed trucks and private cars containing the books to be burned ... Five thousand students, young men and young women together marched in the parade ... It was towards midnight when they reached the great square. There on a granite block of pavement had been built a funeral pyre of crossed logs ... As they passed, the paraders tossed upon the logs the stumps of lighted torches they had been carrying, until from end to end the mass was aflame ... Then the students' president

New York Times, 11 May 1933

'Where books are burnt there one day they burn people'

German poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856)

There were restrictions on what could be published and the Reich Office of Literature had to approve all publications. More than 12 000 titles were banned. The regime was active in setting up public libraries throughout the country, including more than 55 000 school libraries, all stocked with books approved by the regime. By 1939 the literature section of the Reich Chamber of Culture controlled 2500 publishing houses, more than 23 000 bookshops, 3000 authors and the publication of 20 000 new books each year.

German intellectuals who were not prepared to tolerate this assault on the free expression of ideas left the country, mainly to offer their talents to America. These included great thinkers such as Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, over 2500 writers, world-famous musicians such as Kurt Weill, Arnold Schönberg and Otto Klemperer, film directors such as Fritz Lang, and the opera singer Richard Tauber.

ART

In the Third Reich art was also controlled to serve the interests of the state. The Nazis opposed modern and abstract art and in particular Cubism and the Expressionist school of painting, which had flourished in Weimar Germany. This type of modern art, in which the artist sought to convey feelings and emotions, or work by Jewish artists, was simply dismissed as ‘degenerate art’. Hitler had an old-fashioned view of art. In his view it had to be realistic and embrace images of everyday Aryan life, idealised womanhood, landscapes and rural scenes. Nudes were accepted because they glorified strength and the Aryan form. Above all, art had to be understood by the people. The style approved by the state centred on themes linked to nature, the family, heroic struggle and the Fatherland. Art was seen as a way to express the National Socialist ideology and the concept of the *Volk* or People’s Community.

In the area of sculpture, large heroic figures depicting idealised themes of strength, sacrifice and the collective will were favoured. The most important sculptor was Arno Breker. Two of his giant statues, *The Party* and *The Army*, stood outside the entrance to Hitler’s Chancellery in Berlin. All artists and sculptors were strictly controlled through the Reich Chamber of Culture. Any German artist who wished to work was required to join the organisation and their work was expected to reflect the ideology of the Nazi state.

As a propaganda exercise, Goebbels organised the Exhibition of Degenerate Art in the newly constructed House of German Art in Munich in 1937. Over 600 works of art confiscated by the Nazis went on display for almost five months in an attempt to explain what the nation regarded as un-German. The exhibition later toured the country.

Nazi art



ullstein bild – The Granger Collection

Questions

- 1 Explain how this painting by Adolf Wissel expresses the style of art acceptable to the Nazi regime.
- 2 In what way does this painting reinforce other Nazi views about family, children and the role of women?
- 3 How does this style of art differ from that which characterised the Weimar period? (See page 39.)

SOURCE 4.29 Adolf Wissel, *Farm Family from Kahlenberg*, 1939

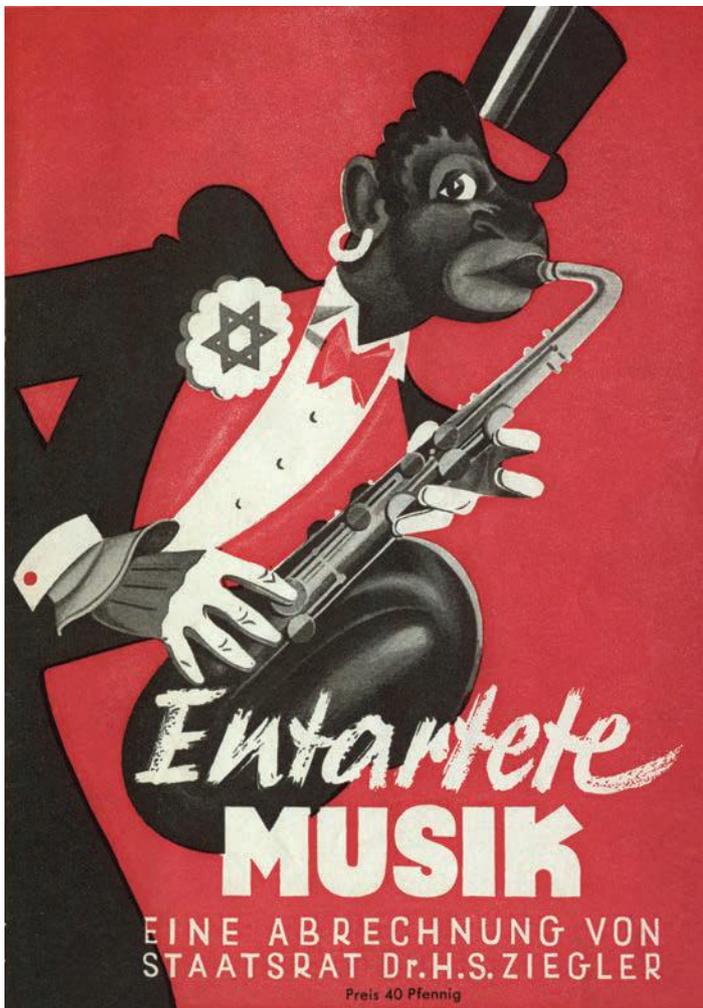
MUSIC

As with art, the Weimar era had seen the growth of innovative and experimental music, but after 1933 the new Reich Chamber of Music imposed strict controls. This body defined what it

regarded as good German music. Classical music prevailed and German composers such as Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss and Ludwig van Beethoven were favoured. Opera and music by non-Germans was tolerated provided it was 'acceptable'. Mozart's operas *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutti* were discouraged because the **libretto** had been written by a Jew. Jewish musicians and conductors were dismissed and a significant number left the country. The music of great composers such as Gustav Mahler and Felix Mendelssohn, who were Jewish, was also banned. Other particular types of music that were banned included any form of modern experimental music. Jazz was also attacked because of its black American origins, although a modified form of popular music related to jazz was permitted.

libretto

Words of an opera



SOURCE 4.30 Poster for the exhibition of Degenerate Music held in Düsseldorf in 1938

ARCHITECTURE

Architecture was another aspect of cultural life that felt the influence of the state. Hitler had a genuine interest in architecture and, through his architects Ludwig Troost and later Albert Speer, the *Führer's* concept of architecture and design prevailed. The innovative Bauhaus school of architecture of the Weimar period, with its emphasis on modernism, was replaced by a style that returned to the classical forms of ancient Greece and Rome. Architecture became functional and monumental, with buildings planned on enormous scale. They gave the impression of a brutal, menacing heaviness and were intended to reinforce the power and permanency of the state.



Albert Speer (1905–1981)

By the time of his death in 1981, Albert Speer had lived three careers. He was Hitler's chief architect from 1933 to 1945, with complete authority to create monumental buildings for the new Germany. From 1942 to 1945, he excelled in another role, as the Minister for Armaments and War Production. His success in this role allowed Germany to carry on the war effort, despite the heavy bombing and destruction of vital industrial production. His third career was the most intriguing: after serving 20 years in prison as a Nazi war criminal, Speer returned to the public stage as a writer and commentator on the history he had been part of.

His early life

Albert Speer was born into a wealthy middle-class family in 1905. Intelligent and hard working, he had considered a career in mathematics, but his father persuaded him to take up architecture.

The young Speer appeared to have no interest in politics, and political issues were never discussed in his family. For him there was the comfortable world of adequate money, rowing, canoeing and bicycle trips with his friends, and hiking expeditions into the mountains. In 1927, after he graduated as an architect, Speer married Margarete Weber, a girl he had known from school. His parents considered Margarete of lower social standing, so Albert informed his parents of the marriage by telegram. The young architect then found work as an assistant to Heinrich Tessenow, one of the most prominent architects and urban planners of the time.

Speer's first contact with the Nazi movement came in December 1930 when he was persuaded to attend a political meeting at which Hitler was to address the students of the Institute and Berlin University. This was the first time he had seen Hitler and it changed his life. 'I was carried on the wave of enthusiasm which bore the speaker along from sentence to sentence,' he wrote. 'It swept away any reservations ... Here it seemed to me was hope. Here were new ideas, a new understanding, new tasks.'⁴ He needed time to think, and after the meeting he drove off into the night alone and went for a long walk. Speer, like so many of his generation, had fallen under the spell of Hitler and in March 1931 he joined the Nazi Party.

Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler

Speer's membership of the party gave him a few architectural contracts and in 1933 he was invited by Joseph Goebbels to renovate the Propaganda Ministry in Berlin. Speer promised that he could complete the work in two months and, true to his word, he finished the work in record time. He was gaining a reputation, not only as a creative architect, but also as an efficient organiser.



ulstein bild - Walter Frenz

continued

continued

Hitler had a genuine interest in art, architecture and design; they had been the obsession of his youth. He got to know of the young architect and was impressed by his architectural skills



ullstein bild

SOURCE 4.31 Albert Speer and Adolf Hitler studying architectural drawings at Hitler's home near Berchtesgaden in 1938

and by the way he spoke his mind in matters of design. Hitler saw in Albert Speer the architect he had dreamt of being. They shared a common bond and a type of friendship developed between the two men. Speer became part of Hitler's inner circle and a regular guest at Hitler's private mountain home, the Berghof, near Berchtesgaden in southern Germany. The German historian Joachim Fest suggests they were united by what he calls 'an emotional relationship'. 'He drew Speer to him like no one else, he singled him out and made him great.'⁵

The architect goes to work

Hitler saw architecture as one way to express the power and permanence of the regime and to pass on his legacy to history. The Nazis rejected the modern style that had developed from the creative period of the Weimar Republic. They favoured the classical, monumental style

Neo classical

A type of architecture based on the classical style of ancient Greece and Rome. It became popular in the 19th century and so the term *neo* (new) classical.

Doric

The oldest and simplest form of Greek column

from Greek and Roman architecture called **Neoclassical**, architecture. Speer particularly liked the classic simplicity of the **Doric** style from ancient Greece, and in his designs Speer actually included drawings of how his buildings would look after a thousand years.

In January 1934, Hitler gave Speer his first major commission – to build the permanent reviewing stand for the Nuremberg Party Rally. He designed a massive stone structure some 400 metres long and 24 metres high on the Zeppelin Field at Nuremberg, which was also enlarged to accommodate 340 000 spectators. The construction was ready for the rally of September 1934. To create a dramatic effect, he surrounded the field with 130 anti-aircraft searchlights, casting massive beams of light some 8000 metres into the night sky. The British Ambassador to Germany at the time called it 'solemn and beautiful ... like being in a cathedral of light'.

Later that same year, the decision was made to build new and permanent structures at Nuremberg, and Speer was again given the task of designing a complex of buildings at the 16.5-square-kilometre Nuremberg Party Rally site. Speer planned for a huge horseshoe-shaped Great Stadium (*Deutschland Stadium*) and an equally impressive Congress Hall (*Kongresshalle*), both designed on the classical model of ancient Greece. The stadium, three

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times the size of the Great Pyramid, would be the largest ever built, with seating for 400 000, while the Congress Hall, with its great glass dome, would sit 50 000. In the end, none of the work was finished. By the time the war put an end to the construction in 1940, only the basic foundations had been started.

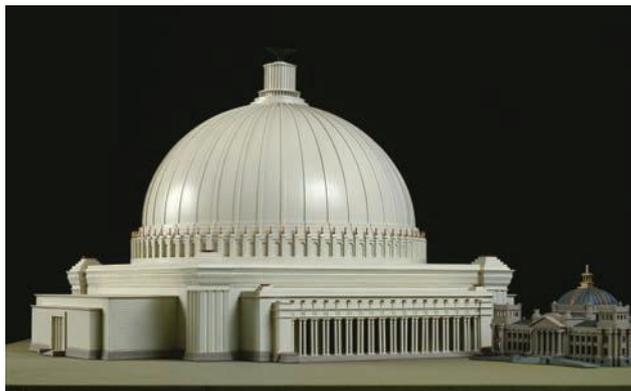
Germania – the dream and the reality

Hitler wanted to rebuild Berlin to a grand design so it would be a capital worthy of his Reich. It was to be called *Germania*, and Speer, with his new title of Inspector General of Buildings for Construction of Berlin, was given total authority to design and build it.

The design was dominated by a grand 6-kilometre long avenue running north–south across the city. At one end there would be an enormous memorial arch dedicated to those who died in the First World War, while at the far end there was to be a Great Hall crowned with the largest dome in the world. Hitler sketched ideas, which Speer used and a vast scale model of the new *Germania* created a powerful image of the vast plan.

The first major construction of the new *Germania* was a new chancellery for Hitler himself. Built in one year and opened in 1939, it was intended to impress the people who would visit it, particularly the heads of other countries. ‘On the long corridor from the entrance to the reception hall,’ said Hitler, ‘they will learn something about the grandeur of the German Reich’.⁶ Speer designed an impressive entry called the Court of Honour, as well as an ornate mosaic hall some 150 metres long, which led to a red marble corridor over 300 metres long, and a grand reception hall, twice as long as the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. The vast Mosaic Hall led to Hitler’s own office, which was 400 metres square with 9-metre-high ceilings. Hitler hardly ever used the massive office, but its purpose to impress was clearly achieved.

Germania was never built. When the war began in 1939 and particularly after Germany attacked Russia in 1941, the building projects stopped. As the war situation worsened there



bpk/Jürgen Liepe

SOURCE 4.32 Speer’s model of the Great Hall, part of his plans for *Germania*, with its enormous dome set in comparison with the existing *Reichstag* building in Berlin



atkg-images

SOURCE 4.33 The vast Mosaic Hall, which Speer built as part of Hitler’s new Chancellery in 1939

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was little call for Speer's talents as an architect or a builder, but there was an increasing need for his other great skill, as an efficient planner and organiser.

Albert Speer and the war

In February 1942, Hitler appointed Albert Speer Minister for Armaments and War Production, responsible for the production of the vital weaponry munitions and defences needed for Germany to avoid military defeat. He also had one additional advantage few other officials had – constant and easy access to Hitler.

Despite the devastating Allied bombing of Germany from 1942 to 1945, which targeted Germany's war machine infrastructure, Speer's management of the war economy produced results. He reorganised armaments production and eliminated duplication, wastage and petty in-fighting among officials by placing experienced industrial leaders and engineers rather than civil servants or generals in charge of departments. He divided the whole area of armaments production into sections, based on the weapon type, with each section run by a committee that reported to him. Production of weapons of war, such as tanks, planes, artillery armaments and ammunition to feed them, all increased. Speer was also careful to promote his work and for the first time the message of war production and images of new and improved weapons became a feature of the propaganda campaign.

Recent historical research is questioning the image of Albert Speer as the miracle worker on armaments production and suggesting that his contribution to the war effort has been exaggerated. There is evidence that production figures were altered to suit the image and that focus was placed on particular armaments when their production figures were increasing at the expense of less favourable production figures for other types of weaponry. There is also evidence that even before Speer became Minister for Armaments and War Production early in 1942, important changes to bring Germany to a full war footing were taking place and that while he furthered these changes, the increases in war production were going to eventuate anyway.

Although Speer later presented himself as a person who was non-political and merely an efficient organiser and manager (an argument that saved him from the hangman after the war), the reality was that he was committed to victory and as fanatical as any other at the top of Nazi leadership. There is no doubt that his skill and his ruthless determination to keep his armaments works in production allowed Germany to prolong the war.

As the demands for total war drew more and more men into combat roles, Speer faced the critical issue of labour shortages in wartime production. He demanded and achieved the total mobilisation of the German workforce for the war effort.

Much of the workforce in German war industry came from foreign workers from occupied countries, from prisoners of war and from concentration camp prisoners. Many concentration camp workers, particularly Russians and Poles, were little more than slaves and were worked to death. There is no doubt that Speer was fully aware of the use of slave labour and approved of it. Speer's deputy, Fritz Sauckel, who was responsible for providing the forced labour, was executed for his crimes in 1946.

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ulstein bild – Walter Frenzt

SOURCE 4.34 Albert Speer in his role as Minister for Armaments and War Production inspecting German armed vehicles in 1943

By September 1944, when war production reached its peak, there were more than seven million foreign labourers and 400 000 prisoners of war working as slave labourers, about 20 per cent of the total workforce. Another seven million worked for the German war effort in their own countries. The increases in wartime production, however, came too late. The military situation had already turned against Germany, and the increasing scarcity of vital raw materials meant that the production levels could not be maintained.

During the Second World War German scientists had developed rocket technology and by 1944 the so-called V1 rockets were available to launch against London and other targets. From 1943, V1 and the more advanced V2 rockets were produced at an underground site at Dora-Mittelbau in the Harz Mountains in northern Germany. A complex of concentration camps to provide slave labour for the missile project were constructed near the site and over 20 000 workers died there in appalling conditions.

Betrayal and farewell

By early 1945 Speer, always the realist, knew that the war was lost. The nation faced invasion by the Russians advancing from the East and by the Allied armies advancing from the West. As well, German cities were now being bombed day and night. Hitler's response was to order a 'scorched earth' policy: the retreating German armies were to destroy all factories, railways, bridges and public utilities such as power plants. Nothing of value was to be left standing for the advancing enemy. Speer refused to obey Hitler's order and from late 1944 he used his authority to countermand Hitler's order to pursue a 'scorched-earth' policy.

On 23 April 1945, Speer flew to Berlin to see Hitler for the last time. Although the Russians now encircled the city, he avoided the constant Russian shelling and landed on a road not far from the ruins of the chancellery he had built for Hitler six years earlier. He found Hitler

scorched earth

A policy of deliberate destruction of infrastructure, industry and property to leave nothing for the advancing enemy

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'empty, burnt out, lifeless ... He showed no emotion at all'. Speer told his *Führer* that he had countermanded his orders, but Hitler did not respond. 'I felt as if I had been talking to a man already departed,' wrote Speer. 'Hitler treated me as an ordinary guest, as if I had not flown to Berlin especially for his sake. We parted without shaking hands, in the most casual manner, as if we would be seeing each other the next day.'⁷ Hitler shot himself one week later.

The war ended on 8 May 1945 and shortly afterwards Albert Speer was arrested by advancing American troops.

Speer at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials

In late 1945, 21 important Nazi leaders, including Speer, were put on trial before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, a court established by the four victorious powers of Britain, France, the United States and the Soviet Union. There were four charges – planning aggressive war, waging aggressive war, engaging in war crimes (included here were the charges of using forced or slave labour) and crimes against humanity (including genocide). Speer was charged on all four counts.

When the trial ended in September 1946, 11 Nazi leaders were sentenced to death, but Speer, although found guilty on two counts, was given 20 years in prison. He had escaped the hangman by convincing the majority of the judges that he was in some way different. His frankness and openness at the trial, as well as his obvious intellect, stood him apart from the others. He could not deny his role in the Third Reich and he accepted responsibility for the crimes committed by the Nazis. However, in a clever defence, he denied any personal responsibility and argued that he was not involved in political decisions. Above all, he claimed he had no knowledge of the Holocaust: the mass murder of the Jews in Eastern Europe. In the matter of forced or slave labour used in war production, Speer claimed that the process of getting these millions of workers and their treatment was not his responsibility. He told the court this was the work of Fritz Sauckel, the Minister for Labour. Sauckel, who took orders from Speer and who was also on trial at Nuremberg, received the death sentence.

The 'good Nazi'

When Albert Speer was released from prison after serving his full term he embarked on a new career as a writer and commentator on the Nazi era. His first book, *Inside the Third Reich* published in 1970, was an international bestseller, making Speer a very wealthy man. Other books followed as well as regular media appearances.

In these years Speer carefully promoted himself as the so-called 'good Nazi' – a man who acknowledged that the Nazi regime had committed great crimes but for which he, as a high-ranking official of that regime, was not personally responsible.

This image of Speer was increasingly challenged as new documents and historical evidence emerged. In October 1971, the historian Erich Goldhagen claimed Speer had been present at a meeting of Nazi leaders at Posen in East Prussia on 6 October 1943 at which Himmler, the Head of the SS, had spoken openly about the killing of the Jews. Speer responded with the claim that he had been at the meeting but had left before Himmler had spoken in the afternoon. Historians have found this difficult to accept, for even if he wasn't there in the afternoon, he knew and worked with plenty of people who were.

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From *The Guardian* (London), 13 March 2007

A newly discovered letter by Adolf Hitler's architect and armaments minister Albert Speer offers proof that he knew about the plans to exterminate the Jews, despite his repeated claims to the contrary.

Writing in 1971 to H el ene Jeanty, the widow of a Belgian resistance leader, Speer admitted that he had been at a conference where Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and Gestapo, had unveiled plans to exterminate the Jews in what is known as the Posen speech. Speer's insistence that he had left before the end of the meeting, and had therefore known nothing about the Holocaust, probably spared him from execution after the Nuremberg trials at the end of the Second World War.

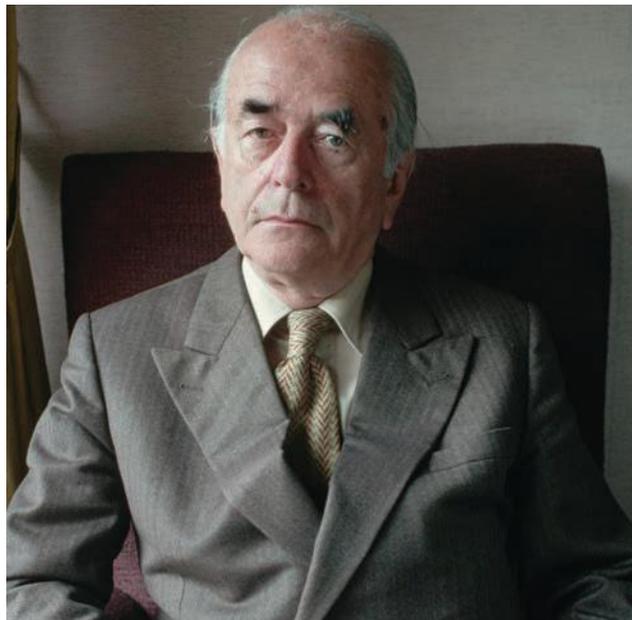
It helped earn him the name of 'the good Nazi' and the image of a genius architect who had misguidedly slipped into Nazi circles to further his career. Instead of facing death as many top Nazis did, Speer served 20 years in prison, mainly for using slave labour.

In the letter to Jeanty, written on December 23 1971, Speer wrote: 'There is no doubt I was present as Himmler announced on October 6 1943 that all Jews would be killed'. He continued: 'Who would believe me that I suppressed this, that it would have been easier to have written all of this in my memoirs?'

The Guardian, London, 13 March 2007

While there is no doubt about Speer's knowledge of the slave labour used in the munitions factories, he claimed at his trial that he did not know about the conditions under which the labourers were kept. Later evidence confirmed the fact that Speer had visited the labour and concentration camp at Mauthausen in March 1943 and the Dora missile factory in December 1943 where thousands of workers died in subhuman conditions.

Speer had also denied any knowledge or responsibility for what had happened to the Jews of Berlin as about 80 000 were deported from the city as plans began to build the new capital *Germania*. Evidence emerged



Corbis/David Reed

SOURCE 4.35 Albert Speer shortly before his death in 1981. In the years following his release from prison he made a fortune through his writings and public appearances.

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after his death that he had attended a meeting to discuss the removal of the remaining Jews from Berlin. Despite his claims at the trial, the evidence now suggests that Speer was fully aware the Berlin Jews were being forcibly removed and that he was probably aware of their ultimate fate.

Conclusion

It could be argued that Speer's performance at the Nuremberg trial was focused purely on avoiding the death penalty. In the years that followed his release from prison, Speer created an image of himself as a man full of regret for his past association with the Nazi regime. The evidence now suggests that Speer not only lied at his trial, but also continued to disguise the truth for the rest of his life. His constant claim that you could not be guilty of a crime if you had no knowledge of it had failed the test of hard historical evidence. Speer was as guilty as any other top Nazi leader.

The Dutch writer Dan Van der Vat in his 1997 book entitled, *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer*, claims Speer was really 'a liar, a fraud and a hypocrite', an opportunist who worked hard and efficiently to meet his goals and support Hitler's war, and one who knew of the mass murders in the East but simply chose not to get involved. 'If Speer was sorry,' writes Van der Vat, 'it was for himself'.⁸

Another important writer on Albert Speer was Gitta Sereny, who published *Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth* in 1995. She came to know Speer well and a bond of understanding developed between them. She believes that he certainly knew of the murder of the Jews and that his constant refusal to face the issue was in fact the great lie of his life. He was a complex, withdrawn, unhappy man who felt a genuine and overwhelming sense of guilt that he found difficult to express. A few weeks before his death in 1981, Speer telephoned Gitta Sereny from his London hotel. She said he sounded happy and drunk. 'What I wanted to tell you was that after all I think I haven't done too badly,' he told her. 'After all I was Hitler's architect, I was his Minister for Armaments and Production, I did serve twenty years in Spandau and coming out I did make another career. Not bad after all, was it?'⁹



Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003)

One woman who challenged the Nazi ideal of women as obedient wives and devoted mothers was Leni Riefenstahl. Not only did she define her own professional life, but by the time of her death in 2003 at the age of 101, she could look back on a turbulent career, including a time when she was one of the most prominent women of Hitler's Germany.

Early life

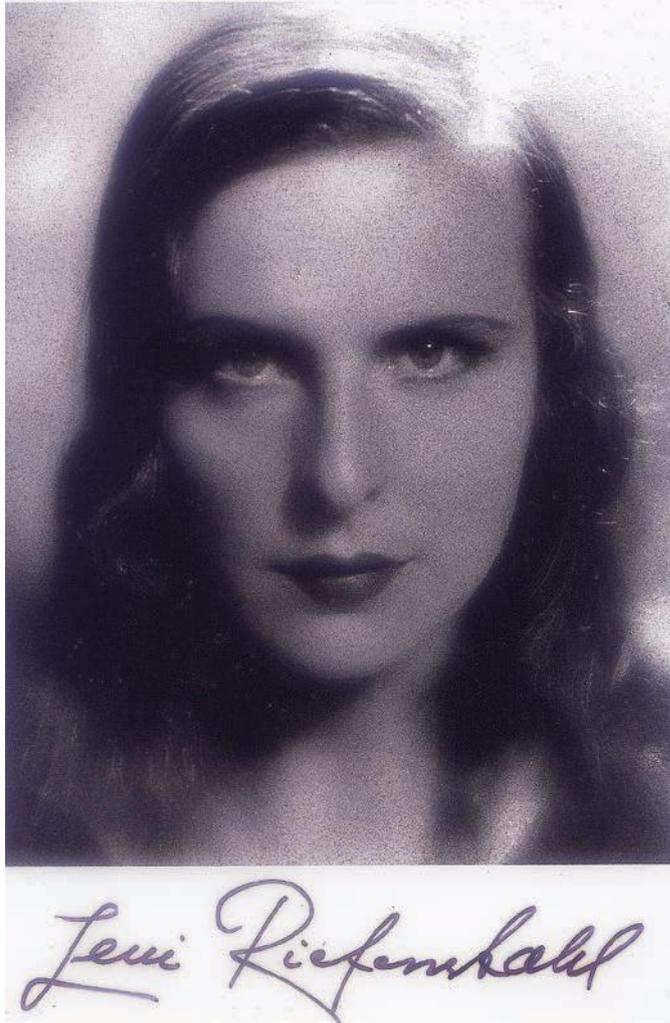
Helene (Leni) Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl was born in 1902 into a comfortable middle-class family. As a young girl, she was athletic and excelled in swimming and gymnastics, but her first love was dance. After her formal schooling, Riefenstahl's father allowed his daughter

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to take dancing lessons and she became a skilled classical dancer, with a particular love for modern dance. In Weimar Germany, Berlin became one of the great centres for the arts and new ideas, and creative experimentation was seen as a way of conveying feeling and emotion. It was into this exciting world of theatre, music, dance and art that the young Leni moved in the 1920s.

Leni Riefenstahl began her career in 1921 and as a professional dancer she travelled all over Europe. However, her dancing career suffered a severe setback in 1925 when, during a performance in Prague, she injured her knee. In her autobiography she tells a story about waiting for a train in Berlin one day and noticing a poster advertising a film called *Berg des Schicksals* (*The Mountain of Destiny*). It was by the German director Arnold Fanck who specialised in



films with outdoor themes and stunning mountain scenery. Riefenstahl went to see the film and it introduced her to the world of cinema. With the self-confident determination that was a feature of her character, as well as her own considerable beauty and charm, Riefenstahl approached Fanck and persuaded him to allow her to appear in his next film.

Arnold Fanck, impressed by the confidence of the young dancer, set to work and wrote his next film, *Der Heilige Berg* (*The Holy Mountain*), especially for Riefenstahl. Between 1926 and 1933, Riefenstahl established her reputation as an actor, appearing in another five films produced by Fanck. All were set in splendid alpine scenery and they were extremely popular. She did most of the mountain climbing herself, she taught herself to ski and she had to face the added danger of avalanches. The films displayed her physical prowess and the fact that she was excelling in the type of rugged activity that had always been the domain of men.

The 'mountain films', as they were known, were very popular and she became well known to cinema audiences. Two people in particular who enjoyed her films were Joseph Goebbels and Adolf Hitler.

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The film director

During the making of the 'mountain films', Riefenstahl spent a great deal of time behind the camera, studying the technique of filmmaking. In 1932 she took on the challenge of producing, directing, editing and starring in her own film, *Das Blaue Licht* (*The Blue Light*). For a woman this was totally new and *The Blue Light* was a great success, winning a silver medal at the prestigious Venice Film Festival in 1933.

Riefenstahl had developed a particular view on filmmaking. Most films of the time were static productions, with the camera in one position, simply recording the action. She believed that the way the story of the film was captured on the screen must relate to the story itself. Riefenstahl came to realise the importance of planning every shot with varied camera angles, of using appropriate music scores and of moving the cameras as well as the action. She experimented with different lenses and with different film stocks, and a balance between short takes and longer sequences. Above all, she spent a great deal of time on the editing process, piecing together her film to achieve the artistic effects she wanted. The editing room, she once said, was her 'magic workshop'.

In late 1932, she was persuaded by her friends to attend a political rally at the *Sportsplatz* where Hitler was to give an address. The Hitler she saw that night fascinated her as he held the audience under his spell. He outlined his vision for the new Germany, and the charismatic power of the man and the way he spoke captured Riefenstahl as it captured so many others. 'He radiated something very powerful,' she later observed, 'something which had a kind of hypnotic effect. That frightened me a little'.¹⁰ Shortly after, Riefenstahl met Hitler, who always enjoyed films and was already an admirer of her work as a dancer and actor. It was the start of a friendship that Leni Riefenstahl never denied and which survived until the end of the Nazi period in 1945.

In February 1933, Hitler offered Leni the opportunity to make films for the new government. Initially she declined, in part because she feared it would restrict her creative freedom and in part because she was not prepared to work within the Propaganda Ministry under the control of Goebbels. She also had no experience of making documentaries and was not even a member of the Nazi Party. However, later that year, if only to please Hitler, she did agree to his request that she make a film of the Nuremberg Party Rally. Her new career as filmmaker for the Third Reich had begun.

Making *Triumph of the Will*, 1934

In 1933, Riefenstahl produced a short film about the 1933 party rally, entitled *Der Sieg des Glaubens* (*Victory of Faith*). She had little time to prepare for the filming and faced obstruction from party officials, who had difficulty accepting a woman in such a role. The overall film effect was disappointing and Riefenstahl herself admitted it more like a newsreel than the creative work that she was capable of. But Hitler was satisfied, and he insisted that Leni make a full feature-length film about the 1934 party rally.

The artist in Hitler appreciated Leni's artistic ability and he understood the importance of having the film made as a work of art rather than another newsreel-type film from the

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Propaganda Ministry. She was to have unlimited resources and could assemble her own film crew. To remove the obstacles put in her way by Nazi officials, Hitler issued a clear party order: 'The motion picture about the National Party rally is to be made by Fräulein Riefenstahl and not by Party film people. Those are my orders.' Joseph Goebbels did not want Riefenstahl on the project, since she would be working outside the control of his all-embracing Propaganda Ministry. Moreover, he had concerns about the effectiveness of this type of direct propaganda film. Later, when the film was completed, even Goebbels could not deny that it was a masterpiece of propaganda.

The 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally was deliberately devised to promote the image of Hitler as the leader of the German people. It had been a difficult summer, with the murder of Röhm and the SA leadership in June and the death of Hindenburg in August. Hitler was now absolute ruler of Germany, and promoting the image of the new Führer was the central theme of the 1934 Party Congress.

Riefenstahl arrived at Nuremberg a week before the rally began, with a crew of 120. She was able to plan every scene with meticulous care, in particular how and where the 32 cameras would be placed. A small lift was built into one of the huge swastika flagpoles so that a moveable camera could rise and give an expanding panorama of the scene. Rail tracks were built in parts of the stadium for other



Corbis

SOURCE 4.36 Leni Riefenstahl directing a scene on the streets of Nuremberg during the making of *Triumph of the Will* in 1934

cameras. There were special filming stands and cranes, and to vary the effect of Hitler's speeches, a circular track was dug around his speaking platform so that a camera could move around him as he spoke. Riefenstahl was given everything she wanted, and when officials sought to restrict her plans she simply complained directly to Hitler.

In seven exhausting days and nights, Riefenstahl and her crew captured over 100 000 metres of film footage. After the shooting, the equally difficult process of editing began, a process that took over five months. It was in the editing that the already powerful images of the film were brought together to create a type of film that art had never seen before. Hitler gave the film its name, *Triumph des Willens* (*Triumph of the Will*), and called it 'an outstanding and unparalleled tribute to the strength and beauty of our movement'. It was released in 1935 and attracted great praise, winning a number of international film awards.

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Making *Olympia*, 1936

In the same year that *Triumph of the Will* was released, Leni Riefenstahl was asked by the organising committee for the Olympic Games to make a feature film about the Games, which were to be held in Berlin in 1936. As she did with *Triumph of the Will*, Riefenstahl planned her film with great care. She insisted on a series of pits being dug in the stadium so that she could capture images of pole-vaulters and jumpers with the sky as the backdrop. Telephoto lenses were again used for intense close-ups of the athletes as they awaited the starting gun, and a catapult was devised to move the camera along the racetrack. Before the Games began, Riefenstahl filmed sequences of rowing and sailing teams in training and later spliced these pre-race segments into the actual races. A race was then depicted in a manner that suggested a feature film, with cuts from the boats, to the oars, to the bow slicing the water,



Getty Images/Hulton Archive

SOURCE 4.37 Apart from her innovative camera techniques, Riefenstahl achieved added dramatic impact by careful editing of her film, a process which often took many months of painstaking work.

or the strained faces of the crew. The same effect was achieved with the diving sequences and the marathon race that closed the Olympic Games.

Riefenstahl was fascinated with the black athletes who attended the games, and many years later she would travel to the Sudan in Africa to capture the Nuba people on film. At the 1936 Olympic Games some black athletes from the United States, in particular Jesse Owens, excelled in the track events. Throughout the filming and editing of *Olympia* the Propaganda Ministry sought to pressure Riefenstahl to modify her film in ways that would support the Nazi view of the superiority of the white race. Regardless of this pressure, Riefenstahl featured the black athletes. Jesse Owens won four gold medals in Berlin and set three Olympic and one world record, and Riefenstahl captured his achievements on film, although she chose not to show him receiving his gold medals.

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Riefenstahl and the Second World War

In the years after *Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl travelled across Europe with her film, and in 1938 she visited the United States. Her visit coincided with *Kristallnacht* (the Night of Broken Glass), the organised Nazi attack on Jewish people and their businesses in Germany. In America she claimed that the news reports of violence against the Jews were false. These images from Germany, as well as the growing international unrest as Germany moved into Austria and threatened other neighbours, began to turn feelings against Leni Riefenstahl. She was seen as the person who promoted the Nazi movement on film and a person who supported the regime. In Hollywood in 1938 she was shunned and the long period of being an outcast in the industry she loved began.

When the war broke out in September 1939, Riefenstahl accepted an assignment to film part of the military action against Poland for Hitler. However, she did not stay long and the experience of what she saw in 1939 led her to quit the assignment. She moved to a village in southern Germany, not far from her much loved mountains, and there she spent most of the war. She resumed work on a feature film, *Tiefland* (*Lowlands*), but the war delayed production and the work was not completed until 1945.

Despite the war, Riefenstahl maintained her contact with Hitler. In June 1940 when Germany defeated France, she sent him a message that did not disguise her admiration. In 1944 she married a German officer, Peter Jacob, and Hitler invited the couple to visit him at his mountain home. It was the last time Leni Riefenstahl saw Hitler and she described him as a much changed and broken man.

Post-war life

After the war, Leni Riefenstahl was arrested and was subjected to a long period of questioning. Her brother had died in the war, her marriage ended in divorce and she suffered a nervous breakdown. In 1952, reduced to living in a Munich flat with her elderly mother, she was finally cleared of any war crimes, but was declared a Nazi sympathiser. Riefenstahl could never work again in film and was shunned by the film industry. As Germany sought to erase the memory of Nazism, her film work was dismissed as Nazi propaganda, the work of a person who had actively supported the regime.

In the 1960s and 1970s Riefenstahl embraced a new life as she discovered the creative potential of still photography. She travelled to remote parts of Africa and lived for a time with the Nuba people in Sudan, a tribe untouched by the modern world. She produced and published a number of books of her photographs, which won wide praise. In her seventies and still very active, Riefenstahl began a new career as an underwater photographer, capturing the beautiful reef formations in the Maldives Islands in the Indian Ocean and on the Great Barrier Reef.

'I feel as though I have lived many lives,' she said in the 1990s, 'experienced the heights and depths of each and, like the waves of the ocean, never known rest. Throughout the years, I have looked always for the unusual, for the wonderful, for the mysteries at the heart of life'.¹¹ As a dancer, actor, film director, photographer and outcast, she was one of the extraordinary women of her time. Born before the First World War she lived to see the new century and died in September 2003 at the age of 101.

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Assessment

Riefenstahl's ability as a film director has never been questioned and both *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* won awards and international acclaim. After the Second World War, praise for Riefenstahl's work, in particular *Triumph of the Will*, continued.

The criticism Riefenstahl faced in the post-war years centred on the debate as to whether these films were documentaries or Nazi propaganda. Riefenstahl herself has always claimed that *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* were documentaries. A documentary is an edited film that captures events as they happened, usually with narration. If Riefenstahl took pictures of what was happening at Nuremberg in 1934 and the Berlin Games of 1936 and presented them without alteration, then there is an argument that they are simply documentaries and therefore not politically motivated. However, others would argue that they go beyond the documentary; that they were carefully planned in advance and then skillfully manipulated or edited for maximum effect or to create a particular image of Nazi Germany. If the aim was to influence the opinion of people who saw them and to see Hitler and the Hitler regime in a positive way, then they were propaganda. Many historians have come to this conclusion, including the British historian Ian Kershaw who argues that 'those seeing the film were clearly witnessing not a documentary on the Reich Party Rally, but a celluloid exposition of the Führer cult'.¹² *Triumph of the Will* is so powerful in its imagery that it needs no commentary as images speak for themselves.

A major charge against Riefenstahl is that she used her considerable talents to benefit Hitler and his movement. After the war she was regularly asked whether she would apologise for her actions. 'Sorry for what?' she said in 1993 '... I was never anti-Semitic and I never joined the Nazi Party. So what am I guilty of?'¹³ This refusal to apologise angered many writers, who saw it as a sign that she remained a believer in the Nazi ideology.

Riefenstahl was also condemned for using concentration camp inmates during the production of her last film, *Tiefland* (*Lowlands*, 1954), made with many interruptions between 1940 and 1941. After the war a Munich court investigated the charges that concentration camp inmates had been mistreated and the charges were dismissed.

There is no doubt that Riefenstahl's films are technically superb and were of enormous benefit to the Nazis as film propaganda. It is up to the viewer to decide whether she actually meant them to be propaganda. At the time her films were made, Hitler was hugely popular, and Riefenstahl's worship of him was not out of step with the vast majority of German society.



SOURCE 4.38 Leni Riefenstahl at her home in Munich in 2000 at the age of 98

Suddeutsche Zeitung Photo

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Other people worked in the performing arts in Nazi Germany, including the conductor Herbert von Karajan. Many of these men resumed their careers in the post-war years. Why was Leni Riefenstahl not able to pursue her film career as well? If *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* had been poor films, it would have been all very different. 'If she had not made the film [*Triumph of the Will*], and not made it so well,' wrote one observer, 'other charges against her would pale into insignificance'.¹⁴

Leni Riefenstahl speaking in 1964

If you see this film again today you ascertain that it doesn't contain a single reconstructed scene. Everything in it is true. And it contains no commentary at all. It is history. A pure historical film ... it is film-vérité (film truth). It reflects the truth that was then in 1934, history. It is therefore a documentary. Not a propaganda film. Oh! I know very well what propaganda is. That consists of recreating events in order to illustrate a thesis, or, in the face of certain events, to let one thing go in order to accentuate another. I found myself, me, at the heart of an event which was the reality of a certain time and a certain place. My film is composed of what stemmed from that.

Leni Riefenstahl quoted in D Thomson, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema*, 1964.

Questions

- 1 What is the main point that Riefenstahl is making in this 1964 interview?
- 2 Explain why you either agree or disagree with what she is saying.

Conclusion

Within months of the Nazis coming to power, they had eliminated political opposition and established a one-party state. What followed was control and influence over most aspects of German life, as Nazi ideology and beliefs began to influence and change German society. Why German society changed and the degree of that change has been the subject of historical debate, but one point beyond dispute is that the great majority of Germans accepted the new order. The Nazi regime had appealed to many in the German population and there was an active level of support for the new Nazi state. At the same time one must consider the role of propaganda and the police state in shaping the German response to the Nazis. These elements played a vital role in Germany after 1933, but even the most effective propaganda and the existence of threat from the Gestapo and the concentration camps cannot fully explain why Hitler was so popular in the 1930s and why the Nazis were able to change the life and experience of so many ordinary Germans.

Chapter summary

- + The Nazis saw the coming to power in 1933 as the start of a revolution that would change German society.
- + Although Hitler was the absolute source of power, he felt above the day-to-day running of the state, intervening only when he chose to.
- + The Nazi state was not an ordered, efficient system. Its nature could best be described as a complex of competing and conflicting interests, which generated a system of administrative chaos.
- + In the 1930s, the Nazis preached the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*; that is, the idea of a harmonious national community of pure Germans free from class division and social conflict. It had popular appeal.
- + Race was at the heart of the Nazi state and before the war in 1939, racial policy included forced sterilisation, attacks on minority groups and euthanasia for those deemed not fit to live.
- + The Nazis sought to influence the youth of Germany to support the new order with organisations like the Hitler Youth and League of German Maidens. The education system also underwent significant changes.
- + The role and status of women changed under the Nazi state. The slogan often used for a women's place in the new society was *Kinder, Küche und Kirche* (Children, Kitchen and Church).
- + The German working class was controlled with the establishment of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*), which controlled working conditions and wages. Organisations such as *Kraft durch Freude*, *KdF* (Strength Through Joy) sought to influence even the leisure time of the German working class.
- + The Nazis restricted religious freedom. The German Protestant Church was more easily influenced by the state, but the Roman Catholic Church, as part of a worldwide organisation, was harder to control.
- + Propaganda was a vital part of the Nazi state. It set out to constantly reinforce the ideology of the party and define the cultural and social life of the nation. This included the spoken word, the press, literature, music, cinema, art, architecture and music.

Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/germany>.

Further resources

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Endnotes

- 1 Rust, Bernhard, quoted in *The Times*, 29 January 1935.
- 2 Noakes, J, & Pridham, G, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 363.
- 3 Quoted in Rhodes, A, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*, Angus & Robertson, London, 1976, p. 34.
- 4 Speer, Albert, *Inside the Third Reich*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1970, p. 15.
- 5 Fest, J, *Speer: The Final Verdict*, Phoenix Press, London, 1999, p. 340.
- 6 Hitler, quoted in Speer, Albert, *Inside the Third Reich*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1970, p. 103.
- 7 Speer, Albert, *Inside the Third Reich*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1970, pp. 479–80.
- 8 van der Vat, Dan, *The Good Nazi: The Life and Lies of Albert Speer*, Phoenix, London, 1997, p. 368.
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- 10 Interview extract from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, Ray Müller, Omega Films, 1993.
- 11 Interview extract from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, Ray Müller, Omega Films, 1993.
- 12 Kershaw, Ian, *The Hitler Myth: Images and Reality in the Third Reich*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, pp. 69–70.
- 13 Interview extract from *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, Ray Müller, Omega Films, 1993.
- 14 Salkeld, *A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl*, Pimlico, London, 1997, p. 257.



Chapter review activities

- 1 Define the following terms: *Volksgemeinschaft*, Aryan race, anti-Semitism and *Völkisch* movement.
- 2 Prepare an extended paragraph on what happened on *Kristallnacht*. Include in your summary an explanation for why it was a turning point in the pre-war treatment of the Jews in Germany.
- 3 Select two of the following and prepare a report that details how these aspects of German cultural life changed under the Nazi state:
 - + music
 - + art
 - + cinema
 - + literature.
- 4 Prepare an extended paragraph explaining whether the phrase *Kinder, Küche und Kirche* is an appropriate description of the treatment of women in Nazi Germany.
- 5 What was the purpose of propaganda in the Nazi state? What evidence is there that it received the very highest priority?
- 6 Select an example of a German propaganda poster from the Nazi era.
 - a Describe what you see in as much detail as possible, including colour, use of language and layout.
 - b Identify basic information about this image, including when it was created, how it was distributed and its intended audience.
 - c Interpret this image. What is the purpose of the poster? What message is being conveyed?
 - d Evaluate this image. Does this image generate a positive or negative response? Explain why you believe the poster is effective or otherwise.
- 7 Prepare a list of arguments both for and against the following statement:
'Without her association with Hitler the world would hardly remember Leni Riefenstahl.'
- 8 Assess this interpretation of Speer's life and career (by German historian Matthias Schmidt):
'A genius motivated by his drive to become and remain a historical figure.'
- 9 Write Albert Speer's obituary, outlining the main events of his life.

- 10 Prepare a multimedia presentation in which you address the following issues:
- + the aim of the Nuremberg rallies
 - + what happened at the Nuremberg rallies.
- Prepare an in depth study on one particular Nuremberg rally, using both images and eyewitness accounts.

Essay questions

- 11 To what degree could it be argued that Hitler carried out his revolution after he came to power?
- 12 Explain why Hitler was so popular with most German people in the 1930s.
- 13 To what extent were the Nazis successful in transforming German society after 1933 to serve Nazi goals and purposes?
- 14 'In the last analysis, despite his undoubted talent and ambition, Albert Speer achieved his place in history by a rare combination of luck and lying.' Do you regard this as a valid comment on the life of Albert Speer?
- 15 Evaluate the work of Leni Riefenstahl during the Third Reich from 1933 to 1945.



Corbis/Michael Nicholson

Poster for the Party Congress at Nuremberg, September 1933



img-images/Müller-Ferris/Alamy.com/Chalbej

GERMANY 1918-1945

9780170444091

CHAPTER FIVE

War and defeat 1939–1945

The Second World War in Europe began in September 1939. It was widely accepted that Hitler had caused the war through his policy of deliberate aggression in Europe, first in the East against Poland in 1939 and then in the West against Britain and France in 1940. In 1941 he widened this war when Germany attacked the Soviet Union and declared war on the United States of America. During 1941, Nazi anti-Semitism also became more extreme. In the context of the war in Eastern Europe, Nazi Germany initiated an unprecedented genocidal program to eliminate European Jews.

In 1945, after five and a half years of fighting, Germany faced total defeat and ruin. Unlike the First World War, which ended when the German Government negotiated an armistice with the enemy, the Second World War was fought to the bitter end. The most visible legacy of the war for Germany was the physical destruction of much of the country. The major cities had been bombed, and infrastructure and industries were in ruin. In 1918, at the end of the First World War, Germany had been spared physical destruction, but this was not the case in 1945. In human terms, about 6.8 million Germans were dead, 3.5 million of them civilians. On a wider scale, the total loss of life among all the European nations at war numbered at least 40 million including approximately six million Jews killed in the Holocaust. Unlike the First World War, the responsibility for the war was clear. For the Allies it had been a 'just war'; a war fought to destroy a great evil.

◀ Russian aircraft over the ruined *Reichstag* building in Berlin, April 1945

INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- + Why did war break out in Europe in September 1939?
- + Why was Germany's war effort so successful in the early years of the conflict?
- + What happened to the Jewish people of Europe during the Second World War?
- + How was Germany defeated?

The coming of the Second World War

Hitler believed that life was a perpetual struggle and he saw the life of the nation in the same way. There had been the long struggle to win power. This was achieved in 1933. There was the struggle to establish the Nazi state and to secure power for the party. By 1935 this too was a reality. From the mid-1930s, Hitler began to concentrate on the ultimate struggle to secure the final destiny of the German people and carry out his vision of Germany's role in the world.

As early as 1924 in his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler defined a broad vision of Germany's role in the world. He planned to undo the settlement imposed on Germany in 1919 by the Treaty of Versailles and create a greater Germany by bringing back into the *Reich* those Germans who had been cut off by the peace treaty. Ultimately, he planned to acquire vast territories in Eastern Europe, which would be Germany's *Lebensraum*, or living space. The aims were deliberate and clear and included the use of force to eliminate Russia and Bolshevism. In 1939 his deliberate attack on Poland, the gateway to Russia, caused the Western powers to finally declare war.

THE CONCEPT OF LIVING SPACE (*LEBENSRAUM*)

The concept of *Lebensraum* or 'living space' was not unique to the Nazis. From 1871 when Germany became a unified state, there was always the view that this new powerful nation state was constrained by its borders. In the late 19th century the solution, in part, was to seek colonies overseas. This was the first expression of *Lebensraum* as Germany from the 1890s sought to create an overseas empire, a move that challenged the power of the British Empire. Colonial rivalry was one factor in weakening Anglo-German relations before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

In 1917, when Germany defeated Russia in the First World War, the concept of *Lebensraum* returned. The victorious Germany forced Russia to sign the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 by which the vast fertile lands of the **Ukraine** as well as regions in the Baltic were occupied by Germany and her allies. Only Germany's defeat in the West the following year deprived it of this territory.

Ukraine

A large region in Eastern Europe, formally part of the Soviet Union, and rich in agricultural land

Hitler also believed in the idea of *Lebensraum* and in *Mein Kampf* he gave a clear expression of his idea, with a new interpretation. He rejected the old idea of seeking new territory in the form of overseas colonies, believing that colonial rivalry had been a major reason for the British entry into the First World War. For Hitler, *Lebensraum* was now a deliberate policy to acquire territory in Eastern Europe at the expense of Russia. But Hitler also added a racial dimension. In Eastern Europe the main racial group was the Slavs, who in Hitler's thinking were inferior people. This vast area, rich in resources, would ensure the survival of the dominant German racial community, the so-called master race (*Herrenvolk*), which would subjugate the Slavs and other races the Nazis believed to be inferior. Germany's destiny lay in these vast lands of Eastern Europe and if the German people were to survive and preserve their racial identity, they would have to acquire new territory by force. In the end it meant the destruction of Russia and its communist system. Hitler saw Russia, a state he believed was dominated by Jewish influence, as 'a ferment of decomposition' and one 'ripe for dissolution'.

Extract from Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1924)

Just as our ancestors did not receive the soil on which we live today as a gift from Heaven, but had to fight for it at the risk of their lives, in the future no grace will win soil for us and hence life for our people, but only the might of a victorious sword ...

When we speak of soil in Europe today we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her border states. Here Fate itself seems desirous of giving us a sign. By handing Russia to Bolshevism, it robbed the Russian nation of that intelligentsia which previously brought about and guaranteed its existence as a state ... For centuries Russia drew nourishment from the Germanic nucleus of its upper leading strata. Today it can be regarded as almost totally exterminated and extinguished. It has been replaced by the Jew ... this is no element of organisation, but a ferment of decomposition. This colossal empire in the east is ripe for dissolution.

A Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Mannheim Translation, London, 1969, pp. 596–8.

Questions

- 1 Why did Hitler believe that it was essential for Germany to acquire territory in Eastern Europe?
- 2 What evidence is there in this extract from *Mein Kampf* that racism was a key element of Nazi foreign policy?
- 3 What two reasons are put forward to explain why Russia would present no threat to the policy of expansion?

THE PATH TO WAR

Eastern Europe after the First World War was made up of a number of new and relatively weak nations. One of them, Poland, contained territory and people taken from Germany in 1919. Eastern Europe also contained significant numbers of Germans who were not part of the *Reich*: three million Germans lived in the Sudetenland, a region of Czechoslovakia; there were Germans living in the Polish Corridor (part of Poland); and there was German-speaking Austria where Hitler himself was born. Hitler, with his concept of the *Volk*, sought to unite all Germans into a greater Germany. In his ultimate quest to win German living space in the East, Hitler would have to deal with the states in Eastern Europe, in particular Poland, that lay between the *Reich* and the Soviet Union.

German rearmament

In March 1935 Hitler announced to the world what most governments already knew, that Germany was following a policy of rearmament. The existence of the new German Air Force was made public, and **conscription** was introduced to bring the army to a size of 500 000 men. Although this was a clear violation of the Treaty of Versailles, the Western powers, Britain and France, took no action.

conscription

The policy of requiring people to serve in the armed forces

The Rhineland, 1936

In March 1936 Hitler challenged the French when he ordered three infantry battalions to cross the Rhine bridges and reoccupy the Rhineland, the area that was to be permanently demilitarised under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The reoccupation of the Rhineland was a great gamble, as Hitler moved against the advice of his generals and in the knowledge that France had vastly



SOURCE 5.1 From 1936, Germany gradually reversed the impositions of the Treaty of Versailles.

superior forces if they chose to resist the German action. Although Germany was once more breaking the Treaty of Versailles, the French and the British again took no action.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland was an important turning point. The Western democracies had given way in the face of German action. ‘If the French had marched into the Rhineland,’ Hitler later admitted, ‘we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs’.¹

The Treaty of Versailles had been undone, Germany was rearming and the Rhineland had been taken back. The economic Four Year Plan, announced in 1936, clearly indicated that the German economy had to be geared to support a war. Hitler’s confidence was high after the success in the Rhineland.

Austria and Czechoslovakia – appeasement in action

From 1937, as rearmament increased, Germany began to follow a more aggressive line in foreign affairs. Improved German relations with Italy gave Hitler the opportunity to move against the neighbouring state of Austria. In March 1938, German troops occupied German-speaking Austria and it became part of the *Reich*. Hitler had united the country of his birth with the country he now led.

In September 1938, after a long and tense period of negotiation, and when the outbreak of war seemed a possibility, Britain and France gave in to Hitler’s demands and allowed the Sudetenland, the German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia, to become part of Germany.

Despite his declaration that the Sudetenland was his ‘last territorial demand’, Hitler had no intention of allowing the rest of Czechoslovakia to survive as a state. In March 1939, German troops entered the Czech capital, Prague, and Czechoslovakia ceased to exist as an independent nation.

The British and French had followed a policy of **appeasement** towards Germany. It was based in part on a deep-seated horror at the thought of another war, and the realisation that

appeasement

The belief that it was still possible to settle the problems with Germany by peaceful means

the Treaty of Versailles may have been too harsh on Germany. As Germany re-emerged as a powerful nation in the 1930s, there was a view that the grievances Germany held had to be settled. It was a view based also on the false belief that Hitler was a reasonable politician who had limited demands as well as the fact that Britain and France were not prepared for any conflict.

The takeover of the rest of Czechoslovakia marked the end of appeasement. This was aggression. For the first time non-Germans had been incorporated into the *Reich*. Appeasement as a policy had been discredited and public opinion in Britain and France quickly swung against Germany. On 31 March 1939, Britain gave a guarantee to Poland, for it was clear that Germany would now attempt to take the Polish state as it had taken the state of Czechoslovakia. Any future German expansion in the East was now not possible without war.



Getty Images/Hulton Archive

SOURCE 5.2 German military forces on parade at the Nuremberg Party Rally of 1936

The Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact, 1939

In 1939 Hitler was determined to deal with Poland. The problem for Hitler was not so much what the West would do if Germany moved against Poland, but what the Soviet Union would do. The last thing Germany wanted was a war on two fronts.

The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin viewed the West with deep suspicion. He had seen Britain and France back down before in the face of German aggression. For their part, Britain and France had little faith in the Soviet Union. Apart from the great ideological gap, they also believed that the Red Army was weak because Stalin had recently purged several thousand officers from the army command.

Although official Nazi policy had always presented the Soviet Union and communism as the enemy of the German nation, it was now in Germany's interest to make an arrangement with Soviet Russia. If this could be achieved, Poland would be isolated.

The Soviet Union was also receptive to some understanding with Germany, and on 23 August 1939, Germany and Russia signed the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact. Poland's fate was sealed, and in a secret clause of the treaty, they agreed to divide Poland between them. The 'non-aggression pact' was in fact an aggression pact against Poland.

The outbreak of war, September 1939

On 1 September 1939, one week after the signing of the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact, Germany launched its two-million-strong army against Poland. Britain and France delayed for two more days, but on 3 September Britain finally issued an ultimatum to Germany to cease its attack by 11 a.m. that day. When the deadline passed, Britain and France declared war on Germany.

‘Now may God bless you all’, said British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in his declaration of war. ‘May He defend the right. It is the evil things that we shall be fighting against – brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution – and against them I am certain that the right will prevail.’

‘Stepping Stones to Glory’



SOURCE 5.3 Cartoon by David Low, published in the *Evening Standard*, London, on 8 July 1936, ‘Stepping Stones to Glory’

Questions

- 1 What is the main point being made in this cartoon by David Low?
- 2 What action by Hitler prompted this particular cartoon of July 1936?
- 3 Explain to what degree this cartoon of 1936 correctly predicted what would happen by 1939.



Hermann Göring (1893–1946)

Hermann Göring was one of Hitler's earliest supporters and was an important figure in the Nazi rise to power. After 1933 he held major posts in the government, including commander-in-chief of the *Luftwaffe* (the German Air Force) in 1935. The following year he was appointed to manage the economic Four Year Plan, which had German rearmament as its central mission. In the Nazi hierarchy, Hermann Göring was second only to Hitler in authority within the Nazi state.

Göring was born in 1893 and served in the First World War where he achieved fame as a combat pilot in the German Air Force. For this he was awarded the *Pour le Mérite*, one of Germany's highest military awards. Like many officers after the war he found it difficult to adjust to civilian life and held a variety of positions, including for a brief time the position of a commercial pilot for a Swedish airline. It was during this time that he met his first wife Carin von Kantkzow, who divorced her husband and married Göring in 1923. Göring had also discovered politics. He met Hitler in Munich in 1922 and joined the fledgling Nazi Party. For six months he headed the new *Sturmabteilung* (SA) and took part in the Munich Beer Hall *Putsch* in 1923 during which he was seriously wounded. Göring escaped to Austria and for the next three years he and his wife lived mainly in Sweden. He endured a long period of recovery during which he developed a drug addiction that would burden him for much of his life.

Göring returned to Germany in 1927 and played an active role in the rise of the Nazi Party. In 1928 he was one of the 12 Nazis to be elected to the *Reichstag*. He became President of the *Reichstag* in 1932 and was involved in the political deals that finally gave Hitler the chancellorship in January 1933.

Göring and the police state

It was Göring who created the structure of the police state after 1933. As one of the three Nazis in the new government, he became Prussian Minister of the Interior, a role that gave him control of the Prussian police force, the largest in the country. As well as this police force, Göring also established an auxiliary police force of some 50 000 SA and SS men. He used these forces to attack the communists, especially after the *Reichstag* fire of February 1933. That same year he established the state secret police, the *Gestapo*, and was involved with the opening of the first concentration camps in Germany. In 1934 Göring led the operations in



ullstein bild - Walter Frenz

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continued

Berlin during the purge of the SA, the so-called Night of the Long Knives, that eliminated the potential threat of the SA to the Nazi regime.

The *Luftwaffe* and the German economy

In March 1935 Hitler named Göring head of the new *Luftwaffe*. From his huge Air Ministry complex in Berlin, Göring and his officials oversaw the construction of aircraft. Ignoring the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, fighters, transport planes and bombers led the list of an array of new aircraft after 1935. By 1938 more than 120 000 people worked in airframe manufacture, 48 000 in engine production and 70 000 building aircraft equipment. Arrangements with other industrial enterprises supplied aviation fuel. By 1939, when war broke out, Germany had the largest and most up-to-date air force in Europe.

These were the years of Göring's greatest influence. Even greater influence came in 1936 when Hitler appointed Göring Plenipotentiary for the implementation for the Four Year Plan – an economic plan that had German rearmament at its core. With this authority, Göring was given effective control over the German economy. The Four Year Plan aimed to make Germany self-sufficient so it could wage war. The plan had its production goals for industry and it involved greater state control over all aspects of the economy. Speaking to German industrialists in December 1936 Göring said:

No end of the rearmament is in sight. The struggle which we are approaching demands a colossal measure of productive ability ... We are now playing for the highest stakes ... all selfish interests must be put aside. Our whole nation is at stake. We live in a time when the final battles are in sight. We are already on the threshold of mobilization and are at war, only the guns are not yet firing.²

Göring and the war

Göring did not welcome the outbreak of the war in 1939, believing that Germany was not yet strong enough, but his private assessments never challenged his commitment to Hitler's will. Hitler himself still held his faith in Göring; in 1939 he was formally declared Hitler's successor and in June 1940 he was appointed *Reichmarschall*, second only to Hitler in authority and power.

However, the progression of the war also marked Göring's slow fall from grace. The German Air Force was unable to secure control over the skies of Britain in 1940 and Hitler suspended then abandoned any intention to invade Britain. During the invasion of the Soviet Union, the capacity of the *Luftwaffe* was also tested. Göring's position was further weakened as Allied bombers began to target German cities. Progressively, Göring lost influence at the centre of Nazi power, a condition helped by the actions of his enemies within the party. There had been significant jealousy from other Nazi leaders, including Himmler, Borman and Goebbels, at Göring's position and influence in Hitler's circle.

Fall from favour

As the war situation worsened, Göring claimed ill health and spent more time away from the centre of power, retiring to his country estate, Carinhall, outside Berlin. His lifestyle, which included lavish celebrations, hunting and amassing a priceless art collection looted from

continued

continued

museums or private owners, became extravagant. His drug addiction remained, his weight ballooned and his health declined.

In the closing days of the war as the Russians closed in on Hitler's bunker in Berlin, Göring sought to assume power in Hitler's place. A furious Hitler deprived Göring of his rank and titles and had him placed under house arrest. Shortly afterwards, with Hitler dead, Göring was captured by United States troops in southern Germany.

Göring was the most senior Nazi official to survive the war and in 1945 he was put on trial at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. His role in the rise and consolidation of the Nazi state, his military role during the war as well as his undisputed knowledge of the treatment of the Jews and minority groups was beyond question. Unlike Speer, Göring made little effort to appease the court and admitted, without remorse, responsibility for many of the charges laid against him. He was found guilty of all four charges – crimes against peace; planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression; war crimes; and crimes against humanity. He was sentenced to death.

On 14 October 1946, only hours before he was due to hang, Göring committed suicide with a capsule of cyanide, which he had managed to smuggle into his prison cell.



Corbis

SOURCE 5.4 Hermann Göring in his prison cell during the Nuremberg trials in 1946. He committed suicide in his cell in October 1946.

Germany and the Second World War

The Second World War in Europe progressed through a number of reasonably defined phases. The opening phase, the years 1939 to 1941, were the years of swift unstoppable German success, with decisive victories by Germany in Western Europe, Greece and North Africa. The war entered another phase in June 1941 when Germany attacked the Soviet Union. Later that year, Germany also declared war on the United States.

The turning point of the war came slowly in late 1942 and early 1943. The Russians finally stopped the German advance at Stalingrad, while the British achieved their first major land victory of the war at the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa. It was also the year in which the United States, with their substantial industrial power, entered the war against Germany. Slowly the fortunes of war began to turn and the final phase of the conflict, the years 1943 to 1945, saw the slow and then unavoidable defeat of Hitler's Germany and the complete collapse of the Third Reich by May 1945.



WAR IN EUROPE, 1939–42

1939	1 SEPTEMBER	Germany invaded Poland
	3 SEPTEMBER	Britain and France declared war on Germany
	6 OCTOBER	Poland surrendered
1940	APRIL	Germany invaded Norway and Denmark
	MAY	Germany invaded Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France
	JUNE	France surrendered
	JULY	The Battle of Britain began
	13 SEPTEMBER	Italy began its policy of aggression in North Africa
1941	15 SEPTEMBER	German bombers attacked London – the start of the Blitz
	FEBRUARY	General Erwin Rommel and the <i>Afrika Korps</i> arrived in North Africa
	22 JUNE	Operation Barbarossa; Germany began the invasion of the Soviet Union
	7 DECEMBER	Japan attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor
	11 DECEMBER	Germany declared war on the United States
1942	APRIL	The German offensive was resumed in Russia with a push south to the Caucasus
	JULY	The German Sixth Army began the drive towards Stalingrad
	SEPTEMBER	The Battle for Stalingrad began
	OCTOBER	The Battle of El Alamein
	NOVEMBER	US troops landed in North Africa

THE BEGINNING 1939–43

When the German army invaded Poland in September 1939, it introduced a new and radical technique of warfare – the concept of *Blitzkrieg* or lightning war. German military thinkers had understood the lessons of the First World War – that wars were won by the side that could achieve the swift advance, not by great armies facing each other along a deadlocked front, fighting a war of attrition.

In the new German army considerable work had been done on the development of tanks and armoured units. The key to the attack on Poland was to use these **Panzer** divisions to drive through the enemy line ahead of the infantry. These highly mobile forces made rapid advances behind the enemy lines before beginning the process of encirclement. The technique of *Blitzkrieg* depended on speed, surprise and the powerful psychological impact of the advancing force disrupting the enemy's military plans and communication.

Panzer

From German, meaning 'tank' or 'armour'

The fall of Poland

Blitzkrieg techniques were ideally suited for the Polish campaign. The flat, open countryside favoured the rapid deployment of armoured and motorised divisions and the German armies pushed into Poland along three fronts. The Polish Air Force was no match for the German *Luftwaffe*. Within two days, the Germans had control of the air and the capital, Warsaw, was heavily bombed. On 17 September 1939 the Soviet Union entered the war and began to invade eastern Poland, linking up with the advancing German panzer groups. Warsaw fell 10 days later, and by 6 October the last Polish troops had stopped fighting.

In five weeks Poland had fallen and the nation was partitioned between Germany and the Soviet Union. Hitler had achieved a swift and stunning victory.

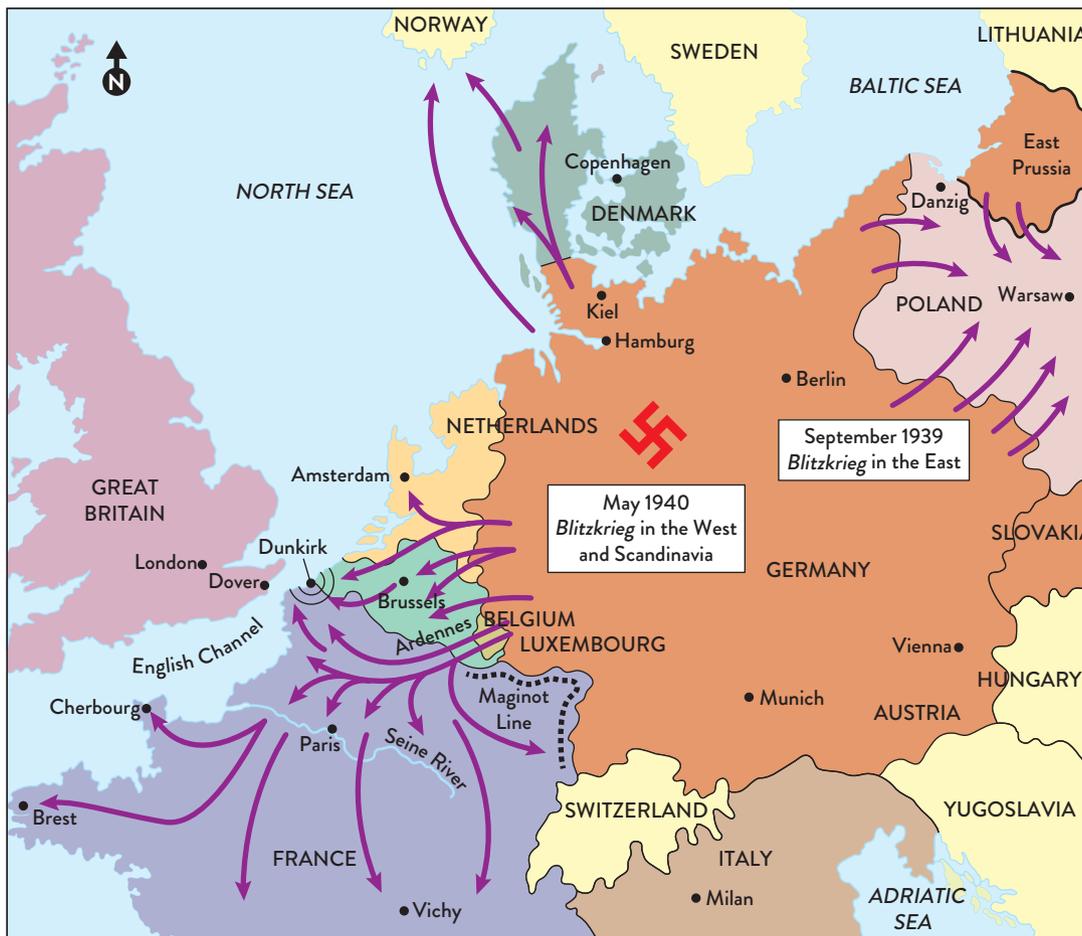
The war in the West

There was no major military action in Western Europe in the winter of 1939–40, and this period came to be called the ‘**phoney war**’. Britain and France were not prepared to negotiate an end to the conflict, nor were they prepared to launch an immediate offensive.

In April 1940 Germany launched its long-awaited attack, with a surprise invasion of two neutral states, Norway and Denmark. The occupation of Norway guaranteed iron ore

phoney war

The name given to the period between September 1939 and April 1940 when there was no major military action on the Western Front



SOURCE 5.5 *Blitzkrieg*: The German advances in the East and then North and West, 1939–1940.

supplies from Sweden and also provided the German navy with facilities on the Norwegian coast. Denmark was occupied because it lay in the path of the German attack.

On 10 May, while the Norwegian campaign was still in progress, Hitler ordered the attack on Belgium, Holland and France. The Germans again used *Blitzkrieg* tactics that were even more overpowering than the attacks against Poland. Holland was quickly overwhelmed and surrendered on 15 May. As the bulk of the British and French armies prepared to meet the Germans in Belgium, the main German attack began further to the south. Army Group A pushed through Luxembourg and across the wooded terrain of the **Ardennes**. French military thinkers had regarded this area to the south as impassable, but within two days the German panzer groups, moving ahead of the main army, broke through the French defences and began their advance towards the English Channel. By 21 May the French and British armies in Belgium were trapped.

Ardennes

A rugged wooded region on the French–Belgian–Luxembourg border. The main thrust of the German attack on France in 1940 came through the Ardennes.

The fall of France, June 1940

Germany did not have overwhelming superiority on the Western Front, but once again the bold strategy, the careful planning and the use of *Blitzkrieg* tactics set the foundation for the defeat of France. In late May and early June, most of the trapped British and French troops were evacuated to England by a fleet of small vessels and naval ships from the coast at Dunkirk. Over 330 000 men were carried across the channel to the relative safety of England; 40 000 others were captured.

On 14 June the victorious German troops entered Paris. One week later, on 22 June, France surrendered. Hitler accepted the French surrender in the same railway carriage in the forest of Compiègne that the French had used to accept the German surrender in 1918. In this symbolic act, Hitler had avenged the German defeat of the First World War and finally erased the insult of the Treaty of Versailles. For many Germans it was a supremely triumphant moment. In only seven weeks the German armies had achieved what the Kaiser's armies had failed to achieve in the entire First World War. Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and France had been defeated and were under German control. Britain was left alone to face the enemy.

Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, 4 June 1940

We shall defend our island home, if necessary for years, if necessary alone ... we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.

Reproduced with permission of Curtis Brown, London, on behalf of the Estate of Sir Winston Churchill.
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Questions

- 1 Explain the main point being made in Winston Churchill's speech.
- 2 What do you imagine would have happened if Britain had surrendered in June 1940 after the fall of France?

The Battle of Britain, 1940

Any successful German invasion of Britain required control of the skies. From its new bases in France and northern Europe, and with over 1300 bombers and 900 fighters, mostly *Messerschmitts*, the German Air Force began attacks on British targets. However, they were handicapped by the lack of time the Germans had over their targets, which were at the limits of the range of many of the German aircraft. The British had a front-line force of only 600 Hurricanes and Spitfires and a critical shortage of pilots, but they could stay in the air longer to meet the enemy and had the added advantage of new technology like radar to guide them into attack.



Corbis/Conde Nast Archive

SOURCE 5.6 London during the Blitz

The Battle of Britain was fought in the skies over southern England from July to October 1940. The casualty rate was high, with a life expectancy for British and allied pilots of only six weeks. In September the Germans began to bomb London and other major cities, but slowly the Spitfires and Hurricanes of the Royal Air Force broke the power of the *Luftwaffe*. Their achievement of the fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain was acknowledged by Churchill when he said, ‘Never in the field of human conflict had so much been owed by so many to so few’. Although Britain was never invaded, its major cities were severely bombed. In September 1940 and for the next 57 consecutive nights, German bombers attacked British cities. The bombing continued into 1941. The ‘Blitz’, as it was called, killed 43 000 civilians, but failed to break the spirit of the British people; indeed it hardened their resolve to defeat Germany.

War in the Mediterranean and the Balkans

During 1940 the war expanded. In the Atlantic Ocean, German U-boats and surface vessels began the campaign to sink ships carrying vitally needed supplies to Britain. This long and deadly sea war in the North Atlantic continued until 1945, when the German U-boat menace was finally beaten.

Germany’s ally Mussolini had watched the rapid expansion of German power and wanted Italy to win its share of glory. In June 1940, Italy declared war on France, and three months later Italian troops moved to expand their empire in North Africa. From their colony in Libya they invaded neighbouring Egypt. The following month Italy also invaded Greece and Albania.

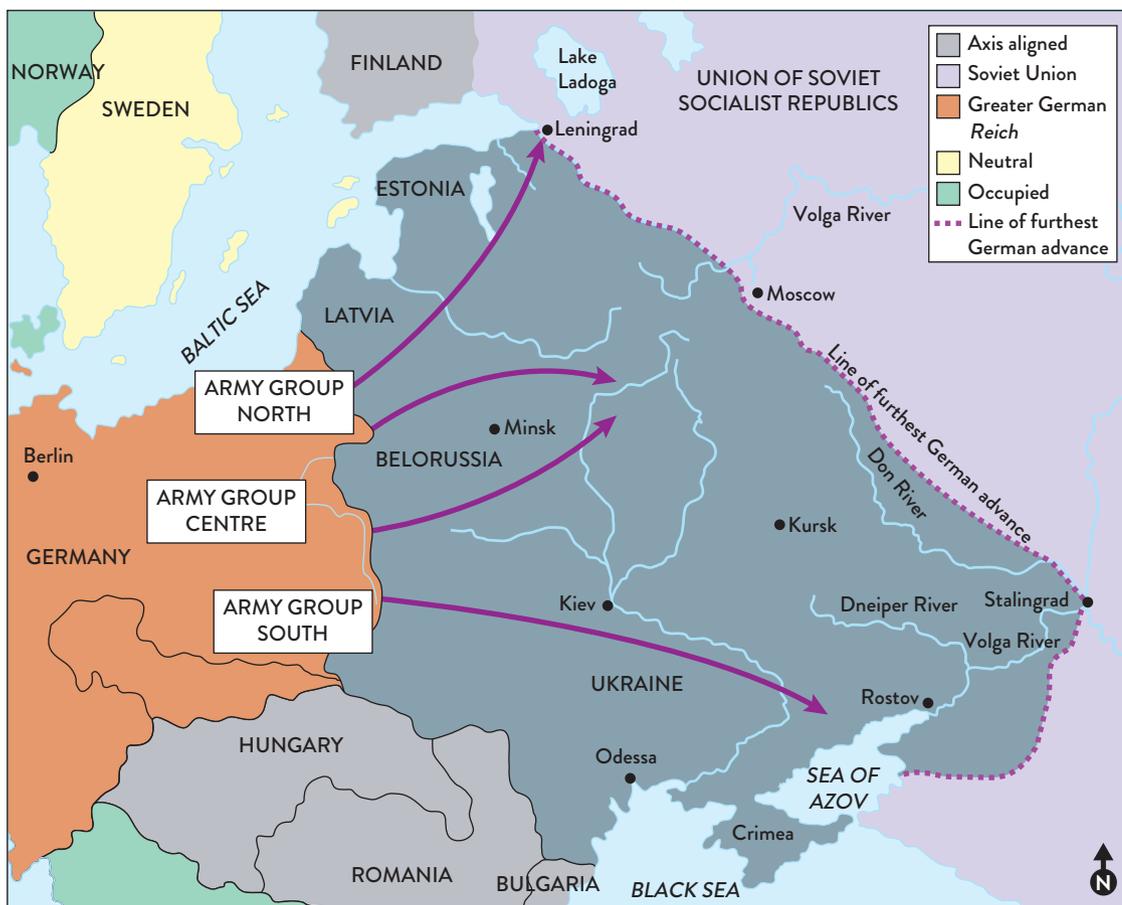
By early 1941, the Italians were in retreat in North Africa and facing defeat in Greece. Hitler was forced to intervene with German military forces to save his ally. The newly formed *Afrika Korps* began operation in North Africa in February 1941 under General Erwin Rommel. In April German armies invaded Yugoslavia and Greece. As the Germans drove into south-eastern Europe, the neighbouring states of Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania became German allies.

The quest for *Lebensraum* – the war in the East from 1941

The expanding war in North Africa and south-eastern Europe were distractions for Hitler. Although the British remained undefeated in the West, Hitler felt an urgency to begin the quest for the ultimate goal of *Lebensraum* in the East. Throughout 1940, plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union took shape.

Operation Barbarossa

The invasion of Russia, Operation Barbarossa, was the largest military campaign of the war. Stalin had ignored the mounting evidence of German troop concentrations on the German–Soviet border and intelligence reports from Britain that the Germans intended to attack. When the attack began on 22 June 1941, the Russians were taken by surprise. Three powerful German army groups made up of 153 divisions, 3 million men and 4300 tanks moved into Russia; Army Group North headed for the northern city of Leningrad, Army Group Centre moved towards Moscow, and Army Group South advanced to capture the food-producing area of the Ukraine. Once again the *Blitzkrieg* tactic was used, with the German tanks and air power spearheading the attack. The Germans were amazed at the speed of their advance and the series of encirclements that captured over 400 000 Russian soldiers.



SOURCE 5.7 The German attack on the Soviet Union, 1941

In late July, Hitler slowed down the advance on Leningrad and Moscow and moved forces to the south to secure the capture of Kiev and the food resources of the Ukraine. While his generals wanted to make Moscow the primary target, and were looking for the decisive battle that would destroy the Red Army, Hitler believed that it was more important to seize economic resources. The Germans succeeded in the Ukraine and captured not only vital resources but also over 600 000 Russian soldiers. By the time the push for Leningrad and Moscow resumed in September, the situation began to change. The Germans did not have the resources

to take both cities as the autumn rains slowed the advance. German troops encircled Leningrad and began a siege that would last until January 1944. Over 900 000 of the city's population died, but the city did not fall.

Army Group Centre reached the outskirts of Moscow. In December, as winter set in, the night-time temperature fell as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius. The German soldiers lacked adequate winter clothing and there were 100 000 cases of frostbite. Fuel froze in the tanks, weapons jammed or failed to recoil, and the German armies were dangerously overstretched, with supply lines at their limits. The Soviet soldiers, reinforced with troops, moved from the far eastern regions of the Soviet Union, launched a major counterattack that drove the Germans back over 150 kilometres before they stabilised their line. For the first time in the war, German forces had suffered a defeat. The swift victory Hitler had demanded did not come.

The first six months of the Russian campaign had been costly. The Red Army suffered greater losses than any army in history, with five million killed or wounded, and another five million taken prisoner. The German army had lost more than one million. There is no single cause for the failure of the 1941 campaign. The Germans had seriously underestimated the strength and resolve of the Russians. Russia had more than 17 million men of military age and Stalin also tapped the powerful force of nationalism when he called on the Russian people to defend not the state but 'Mother Russia' against the invaders. Germany's military strategy was also flawed, as it sought to achieve too many military goals at once. The front was too wide. There was not one principal target but three, and only one (the Ukraine) was taken. Finally, with arrogant certainty about their ability to achieve a swift victory, the German military planners had underestimated the consequences and reality of a winter campaign.



SOURCE 5.8 German soldiers after fighting to secure a Russian village during the invasion of Russia in 1941

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

From the diary of General Halder, German Chief of Staff, 11 August 1941

The whole situation makes it increasingly plain that we have underestimated the Russian colossus ... At the outset of the war we reckoned with about 200 enemy divisions. Now we have already counted 360. These divisions indeed are not armed and equipped according to our standards and their tactical leadership is often poor. But there they are and if we smash a dozen of them the Russians simply put up another dozen. The time factor favours them as they are near their own resources whereas we are moving further and further away from ours. And so our troops, sprawled over an immense front line, without any depth, are subjected to incessant attacks of the enemy.

C Burdick & HA Jacobsen (eds), *The Halder War Diary 1939–1942*, London, 1988, p. 506.

Questions

- 1 What factors were causing concern to the German Chief of Staff General Halder as the first year of the Russian campaign drew to a close?
- 2 Although poorly 'armed and equipped', what particular advantage did the Russians appear to have?

Germany declares war on the United States

In the very week that the Russian commander General Zhukov inflicted the first defeats on the German army in the snow outside Moscow, Japan entered the war by attacking the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Japan was Germany's ally and on 11 December Hitler honoured this alliance by declaring war on the United States. Within six months Germany had attacked the Soviet Union and declared war on the United States, which were, in the words of the British historian AJP Taylor, 'two world powers who only asked to be left alone'.³ President Roosevelt understood the real danger of Germany, and from the start the United States' military strategy and policy was based on the decision to defeat Germany first.

Caucasus

A region with oil deposits, once part of Russia, lying between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea

The Russian campaign, 1942

In 1942 the new summer offensive in Russia was based on a revised plan to push south to capture the vital oilfields of the **Caucasus** while holding the line elsewhere on the Eastern Front. Resupplied and reinforced, the Germans once again enjoyed swift progress as they pushed to the south-east, taking the Crimean peninsula and capturing over 300 000 soldiers.

Stalingrad

In late August 1942, the German army reached the city of Stalingrad on the Volga River and in the weeks of savage fighting that followed, the Germans slowly took most of the city. Stalin ordered that the city that bore his name was to be defended at all costs, and two powerful armies were assembled to the north and south of Stalingrad under the command of General Zukhov. By 1942 the Russian supply position was much better, as factories far to the east in Soviet Asia and the huge labour force in the distant parts of the Soviet Union produced weapons and equipment for the Red Army.

As a second winter set in, the Russian armies on the flanks broke the German lines at their weakest point and, in a sweeping movement, encircled the city. The German Sixth Army, in all some 300 000 men, was trapped. The commander of the German forces at Stalingrad, Friedrich von Paulus, asked for permission to break out, but Hitler refused and ordered the Sixth Army to fight to the end.

The Germans endured the winter, starvation and the Russian attacks, and in January 1943, a day after Hitler had promoted him to Field Marshal, Paulus surrendered what was left of his army to the Russians. Of the 300 000 men who made up the once mighty Sixth Army, 110 000 survivors were captured. Only 6000 ever saw Germany again.

Failure in the East and the Battle of Kursk

The Russian victory at Stalingrad was one of the major turning points of the war. The heavy losses inflicted on the Germans could not be replaced, particularly since Hitler also had to cover other military fronts, including the worsening situation in North Africa. The Red Army was now better supplied and was also receiving **Lend Lease Aid** from the United States. By October 1943, 3500 tanks and 7000 aircraft had been shipped across the Arctic Circle to the Russian ports of Murmansk and Archangel. But above all, the Russians were able to significantly increase the size of the Red Army, despite the terrible losses in battle, from 175 infantry divisions when the German attack began in 1941 to 513 divisions by the end of 1943.

To counter the worsening situation on the Eastern Front, the Germans launched a new attack on the Russian line at Kursk. The Battle of Kursk, that raged for 18 days in July 1943, saw the greatest tank battle of the war. It was also another Russian victory, with the Germans suffering over 500 000 casualties. Slowly the Russian army began the push that would force the German army back towards the *Reich* itself. The cost of Hitler's dream for *Lebensraum* in the East was staggering. Some 2.7 million German soldiers died on the Eastern Front. The Soviets lost 11.4 million, killed or missing, including 3.5 million prisoners of war who died in captivity.



SOURCE 5.9 A Soviet soldier with a severely frostbitten German prisoner after the capture of Stalingrad in January 1943. The German defeat at Stalingrad was a major turning point of the war.

Bundesarchiv/D. Ang

Lend Lease Aid

An aid program begun by President Roosevelt of the United States to provide military assistance and other support to Britain and later the Soviet Union in their struggle against Germany

The war against the Jews

The bulk of European Jews lived in Eastern Europe, in Poland and western Russia. The swift victory of Germany's armies, especially after the invasion of the Soviet Union, now brought millions of other European Jews under the direct control of the growing Nazi empire. It was under the cover of the war that the persecution of the Jews assumed its final terrible form – a war of extermination. By the end of the war in 1945, almost six million Jews had been murdered, including 1 million children. Two out of every three European Jews died in the worst example of **genocide** in history – an event etched in human experience as the Holocaust.

genocide

The murder of a race



THE HOLOCAUST

1939	1 SEPTEMBER	German invasion of Poland
1939–40		Ghettos established in Poland
1940	20 MAY	Concentration camp established at Auschwitz
1941	22 JUNE	German invasion of the Soviet Union
		Mass shooting of Jews and others in Soviet territories
1941	28–9 SEPTEMBER	Approximately 30 000 Jews killed in a mass shooting at Baba Yar, Ukraine
	OCTOBER	Establishment of a larger extermination camp at Auschwitz, known as Auschwitz-Birkenau
	7 NOVEMBER	Approximately 13 000 Jews from the Minsk ghetto killed in a mass shooting
	30 NOVEMBER	Approximately 10 000 Jews from Riga ghetto killed in a mass shooting
	8 DECEMBER	Chelmo extermination camp established
1942	20 JANUARY	Wannsee Conference determined protocols for the 'Final Solution'
1942–43		Systematic extermination of Jews from across Europe in extermination camps
1944	15 MAY	Mass deportation of approximately 440 000 Jews from Hungary to extermination camps
Late 1944 – early 1945		Extermination camps shut down and destroyed. Death marches commence
1945	27 JANUARY	Soviet forces reached Auschwitz
	MAY	Germany surrendered

ghettos

Defined parts of some European cities in which the Jewish population was restricted and forced to remain

PLANNING THE FINAL SOLUTION

During the war, the decision was made to begin the systematic killing of Jews. There is no exact date or document that shows when Hitler finally approved the so-called 'Final Solution', but the fact that he approved it is not in doubt. Most historians believe that the decision to exterminate the Jews was taken in the summer of 1941 following the initial success of the German attack on the Soviet Union. The Nazi policy of removing the Jews by other means, particularly emigration, had failed, and the victories in the East encouraged the Nazi leadership that the time had come to plan a more radical solution to the problem.

In late 1941 the decision was made to relocate all the Jews in Germany and the occupied territories and to transport them to the East. The official reason was 'resettlement', but in reality the decision had been made to exterminate them. The SS became the instrument that carried out Hitler's racial policy and the killing of Jews and others in occupied Europe.

GENOCIDE BEGINS

The first systematic persecution of Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe began in Poland. Following the occupation of Poland in 1939, Polish Jews were herded into ghettos and camps. The largest of these ghettos was in the Polish capital, Warsaw, where roughly 400 000 Jews were housed in a small area of the city. In 1941 alone it is estimated that around 40 000 people in this ghetto starved to death. By the end of the war over 90 per cent of Poland's Jewish community had been killed in ghettos and later in labour and death camps.

In 1941, as the German army advanced into the Soviet Union, special units were formed for the purpose of killing political prisoners and Jews. These Special Action Groups (*Einsatzgruppen*) operated with absolute authority. There was little or no attempt to conceal their activities – they often photographed their work and regularly made use of local collaborators in carrying out their orders. The majority of their victims were Russian Jews. Most were shot in mass killings and their bodies buried in mass graves. The largest single mass-killing operation was at Babi Yar, near Kiev in the Ukraine, where 33 000 Jewish men, women and children were killed in two days in September 1941. In the first year of their activity in the occupied East, these death squads killed around 1.4 million people.

The Wannsee Conference, 20 January 1941

On 31 July 1941, Reinhard Heydrich, deputy to the SS leader Heinrich Himmler, had a 10-minute meeting with Hermann Göring, who was second only to Hitler in authority in Germany. At this meeting Göring empowered Heydrich to draw up arrangements for the overall solution to what the Nazi leadership called 'the Jewish problem'. Göring's letter gave Heydrich the authority to make all necessary preparations 'for the implementation of the projected final solution of the Jewish question'.⁴ There is no doubt what the order intended. At his trial in 1961 for his part in carrying out the Final Solution, Heydrich's deputy Adolf Eichmann observed that it was an order for 'the planned biological destruction of the Jewish race in the eastern territories'.⁵

In January 1942, Heydrich called a secret conference of 15 senior government and SS officials at Wannsee, a lakeside suburb of Berlin, to discuss the technical details for the 'Final Solution',



SOURCE 5.10 The house at Wannsee near Berlin where in January 1942 a secret conference took place to begin planning for the Final Solution. Today the building is a memorial to the Holocaust.



Corbis

SOURCE 5.11 Reinhard Heydrich, Deputy to SS Head Heinrich Himmler. He chaired the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 to plan the killing of European Jews. He was assassinated six months later in June 1942.

the Nazis' code for the deliberate, planned killing of all European Jews. The Wannsee Conference met for the purpose of finding ways to expand the slaughter and make the killings more efficient. The method of mass shooting was recognised as inefficient and demoralising for the perpetrators.

One of the officials at the Wannsee Conference was SS leader Adolf Eichmann, who presented details of the numbers of Jews involved, some 11 million. The conference considered the problems of the transportation of such large numbers and the most effective way of dealing with them when they arrived at the extermination camps that were then opening in occupied Poland. 'The talk,' Eichmann said, 'was of killing, elimination, and annihilation'.⁶

The death camps

Already special camps were being built in the East; mostly near railway transport in order to speed the movement of people, and the gassing of Polish Jews from the ghettos had already begun. Evidence became available as to the most efficient method of killing large numbers. Shooting used by the *Einsatzgruppen* in Russia was considered too slow, and the gassing by carbon monoxide from mobile gassing units using specially modified vans had also proved unreliable. The planners of the Final Solution also used evidence from the

elimination of almost 70 000 mentally or physically handicapped Germans who were killed in euthanasia centres.

Between 1941 and 1942 a series of extermination camps, including Auschwitz–Birkenau, Sobibor and Treblinka, were built, in the occupied areas of Eastern Europe. From 1942, Jews from all over Nazi-occupied Europe were transported East, usually in cattle trains, to these extermination camps. A selection process followed, with those deemed unfit for work, the old,

the young and women with children killed almost at once; others were used as slave labour in industry before most of them were also killed. The systematic extermination campaign began in 1942 and continued until the advancing Russians overran the camps in 1944. Even then, many thousands were taken back to Germany and the killing continued until the last days of the war. The number of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis was approximately six million.

Most of the killing was done by mass gassing, using a form of prussic acid gas known as Zyklon B. Huge orders for the gas were placed with the chemical company IG Farben, one of a number of German companies that also used forced labour from the camps. All of the extermination camps were in occupied Poland, far away from Germany. The largest complex was at Auschwitz–Birkenau, selected because of its easy rail access. Auschwitz–Birkenau had been opened as a labour camp to service the nearby IG Farben synthetic rubber plant, but from October 1941 it also became an extermination camp.

At the camp, between 1942 and 1945, over 2 million people were killed in the gas chambers, which were disguised as shower rooms and which were capable of killing 2000 people at a time. The gas pellets were dropped down metal columns from the roof, giving off deadly cyanide gas.

As the war continued, the transportation of the Jews to places like Auschwitz and other death camps went on, regardless of arguments that the rail stock was vitally needed elsewhere, or that the Jews could have been used more effectively as labour for the war industry. Ideology prevailed over all else. In 1944, as the Russians were poised to enter Poland, the killings actually increased. One consignment of Zyklon B gas filled 20 trucks, as more than 400 000 Jews from Hungary were gassed at Auschwitz in a two-month period before the camp closed in November 1944. Historians estimate that the overwhelming majority of the 3.5 million people killed in the six major extermination camps were Jews.



SOURCE 5.12 Arrival of a train containing Jews deported to Auschwitz death camp in Poland in 1944. The women and children have been separated from the men and most of them would have been murdered soon after arrival.



SOURCE 5.13 Suitcases from murdered inmates at the Auschwitz camp

The horrors of Auschwitz

Then they would feel the gas and crowd together away from the menacing columns and finally stampede towards the huge metal door with its little window, where they piled up in one blood-spattered pyramid, clawing and mauling each other even in death. Twenty-five minutes later the exhaust electric pumps removed the gas-laden air, the great metal door slid open and the men of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* entered, wearing gas masks and gum boots and carrying hoses, for their first task was to remove the blood and defecations before dragging the clawing dead apart with nooses and hooks, the prelude to the ghastly search for gold and the removal of teeth and hair which were regarded by the Germans as strategic materials. Then the journey by lift or rail wagons to the furnaces, the mill that ground the remains to fine ash, and the lorry that scattered the ashes in the stream of the Sola.

Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution*, Sphere Books, London, 1971.



SOURCE 5.14 The site of the main concentration and extermination camps in Germany and Poland

Death marches and beyond

As the extermination camps were shut down with Soviet forces moving into Eastern Europe in late 1944, camp prisoners were force-marched back towards Germany. What had been a systematic system of extermination became increasingly brutal. SS guards shot out of hand any prisoner who fell behind. The sick, the infirm and the weak were summarily executed in the winter of 1944–45.

The human toll

TABLE 5.1 The human toll of the concentration camps

Country	Deaths	Percentage of pre-war population
Poland	3 000 000	90.90
Soviet Union	1 100 000	36.40
Hungary	569 000	69.00
Romania	287 000	47.10
Lithuania	143 000	85.10
Germany	141 500	25.00
Netherlands	100 000	71.40
Bohemia/Moravia	78 150	66.10
France	77 320	22.10
Latvia	71 500	78.10
Slovakia	71 000	79.80
Greece	67 000	86.60
Yugoslavia	63 300	81.20
Austria	50 000	27.00
Belgium	28 900	44.00
Italy	7 680	17.30
Estonia	2 000	44.40
Luxembourg	1 950	55.70
Norway	762	44.80
Denmark	60	0.70

Raw numbers do little to adequately convey the magnitude or horror of the Holocaust. Each death was a person, an individual with hopes, dreams and aspirations. Numbers alone also conceal that whole families and communities were also destroyed in a deliberate process of extermination. The lives of survivors, including those in the camps and those who managed to hide through the war years, were also, unsurprisingly, fundamentally changed by the experience.

Such was the magnitude of the Holocaust that the term ‘genocide’ emerged in 1944 to attempt to encapsulate and describe the systematic killing of a people. In the wake of the Holocaust the international community, for the first time, defined in international law the very idea of a crime against humanity. It was on the basis of this understanding that perpetrators of genocide would stand to account at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials and in later trials.



Corbis/Bettmann

SOURCE 5.15 Justice: Adolf Eichmann, a high-ranking officer of the SS and one of the men who attended the Wannsee Conference, faces trial in Israel in 1961 for his part in carrying out the Final Solution. The glass booth in which Eichmann sat was to protect him from attack. Eichmann was hanged in May 1962.

EXPLAINING THE HOLOCAUST

As a historical event the Holocaust is a dark moment for the world, particularly Europe, and the struggle to understand it remains a challenge. Like all major historical events, the Holocaust has been the subject of significant debate. One particular aspect of the interpretation of the Holocaust that dominated the historiography of the Nazi period revolves around the issues of why it happened. Assessing Hitler's role in the Holocaust has been the focus of much debate. While historians have differed in their explanation as to how or why the Holocaust came about, no serious historian has ever doubted that Hitler knew of and approved the Final Solution as it evolved. Although there is no surviving document that links Hitler to any direct order for the destruction of the Jews, most historians accept that without Hitler there would have been no Holocaust. This lack of any direct written evidence is not surprising, for Hitler loathed the world of paperwork and bureaucracy and preferred to work through the spoken word. All that was needed was the verbal comment. Others interpreted his will or suggestion and the 'Führer's will' was enough to initiate action in the Nazi state.

The intentionalist argument

As for most major historical events, historians offer different interpretations about how and why the Holocaust came about. One group of historians, called the 'intentionalists', see Hitler as the key element in bringing the Final Solution into being. They argue that the mass extermination of the Jews was always intended and that everything Hitler said about the

continued

continued

Jews he meant. This argument suggests that in 1941, under the cover of war and victory in the East, Hitler deliberately ordered the process to begin. That opportunity came in 1941 as the Germans occupied large areas of Eastern Europe.

The historian Saul Friedlander, in his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997), suggested that from the start Hitler followed a policy of 'eliminationist anti-Semitism', a policy of excluding German Jews from the life of the nation. This took place very deliberately during the 1930s and included attempts by the Nazis to get the Jews to move out of Germany. During the war, when millions of other Jews came under Nazi control, anti-Semitism moved to the next stage. 'Eliminationist anti-Semitism' became the 'exterminationist anti-Semitism' of the Holocaust.

The functionalist argument

Other historians have difficulty with this interpretation, suggesting that the historical evidence does not support a claim that there was any long-term plan for what happened. The German scholars Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat favour the so-called 'functionalist' or 'structuralist' position. They argue that the Final Solution was not triggered by some general order or by some long-term plan; rather, it came about because of the increasing radicalisation of the war, particularly after the invasion of the Soviet Union from 1941.

Before the war, the aim had been to rid Germany of the Jews, but with the invasion of Poland and then the Soviet Union, millions of Jews fell under Nazi rule. This marked the start of the policy to eliminate these Jews in the East, and the violence against the Jews in the Soviet Union and Poland and the activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* were examples of this.

The functionalists suggest that, as the war began to turn against Germany and attempts to find other solutions to the Jewish question failed, the Final Solution simply evolved rather than being deliberately planned in advance. This was made easier because, from the very start, the Nazi movement had been anti-Semitic and years of propaganda and ideology influenced the process. It was also caused by the chaotic process of decision making within Germany. As conditions in Eastern Europe became more difficult and as solutions had to be found, this led to improvisation and radicalisation. Policies simply became more extreme, more radical and more genocidal. The Final Solution was not so much a long-held intent, but it evolved from the immediate situation after 1941. It was improvised by the bureaucrats [officials] who devised a solution to their leader's 'Jewish problem' as a means of shoring up their own position.

Moderate functionalism

With continuing research, other historians suggest that neither of these historical arguments – intentionalist or functionalist – offer a really adequate explanation of the Holocaust. The American historian Christopher Browning has suggested the term 'moderate functionalism', a position between both the intentionalist and the functionalist position. It takes the functionalist view that Hitler never had a long-held plan to exterminate the Jews, but it accepts the intentionalist position that Hitler made all the major decisions in the area of Jewish policy and, as far as the Jews were concerned, nothing happened without his knowledge. Hitler may not have planned what ultimately happened, but he was the driving force and the Holocaust would not have happened without him. As the war situation changed, he progressively radicalised his position. His intentions were known, others made them reality and the Holocaust was the result.

The beginning of the end, 1943–45

By 1943, the German armies had lost the initiative on all fronts and they never regained it. The great offensives of the early years of the war gave way to Germany on the defensive. In North Africa, Rommel's advance towards Egypt was stopped by the British Eighth Army at the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942, and the Germans were pushed back towards Libya. 'Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end', Churchill told the British Parliament in November 1942, 'but it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning'.



THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN EUROPE, 1943–44

1943	27 JANUARY	The first American bombing raids over Germany
	31 JANUARY	The German Sixth Army surrendered at Stalingrad
	FEBRUARY	Goebbels called on the Germans to wage 'Total War'
	JULY	The Allies began their invasion of Sicily
	SEPTEMBER	German troops occupied Rome
	NOVEMBER	British air raids began over Berlin
1944	JANUARY	Soviet troops entered Poland
		Allied forces landed at Anzio, south of Rome
	5 JUNE	Rome was liberated
	6 JUNE	D-Day, the Allied landing at Normandy in France
	JULY	An attempt to assassinate Hitler failed
	AUGUST	Paris was liberated

THE SECOND FRONT

As the Russians turned the tide of war in the East, the Allied forces prepared for the massive invasion from the west. In November 1942, US troops entered the fighting against Germany and its allies with a combined American/British landing in French North Africa. By May 1943 all Axis forces in North Africa had been eliminated. From their position in North Africa, the Allies invaded Sicily and then Italy. Mussolini was overthrown and Hitler was forced to move essential troops from the Russian front to resist the Allied advance towards Rome.

By 1944 Britain, the United States and their allies had assembled an enormous force of almost 3 million men, 4000 vessels and 11 000 aircraft on the southern coast of Britain. Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Europe, was about to begin.

While preparations for the invasion continued, the British and American air forces increased their bombing of German cities and industrial targets. In May 1942, Cologne became the first German city to be attacked by a 'Thousand Bomber Raid'. Fifteen thousand tons of bombs were dropped in two hours, destroying half of the city. From 1943 the Americans bombed targets by day and the British carried out the night raids.



SOURCE 5.16 Potsdamer Platz in the heart of Berlin. The bombing of German cities by the British and American air forces from 1943 to 1945 caused enormous loss of life and disruption of vital war production. It did not, however, break the German morale or will to fight on.

D-DAY – THE NORMANDY LANDING

On 6 June 1944, D-Day (Deliverance Day), the Allied invasion of Hitler's so-called Fortress Europe (*Festung Europa*), began. The German commander in the west, Field Marshal von Rundstedt, expected the attack to come at Pas de Calais, the narrowest point between Britain and France. In fact, the landings took place further to the west on the beaches of Normandy. Despite determined German resistance, the landing succeeded and on the first day some 150 000 men came ashore. Within four weeks, a million men had followed. In August 1944 the Allied armies broke out from their bridgehead at Normandy and Paris was liberated on 25 August. Hitler now faced the consequences of his failure to defeat Britain in 1940 – invasion from two fronts; the Russians advancing from the east, and the British and American armies with their Allies starting their move from the west.

THE FINAL COLLAPSE, 1945

The Allied advance that had begun after the D-Day landing in June 1944 faced heavy German resistance, particularly as the troops neared the borders of Germany. In the East, Soviet armies crossed the Oder River into eastern Germany in January 1945. Berlin was only 100 kilometres away. Two months later, the Allied armies crossed the Rhine River, the last natural barrier into the heart of Germany.



Hitler returned to Berlin in January 1945 and, from his bunker beneath the garden of the ruined Reich Chancellery, where he lived until his suicide on 30 April 1945, he presided over the last days of the *Reich*. Hitler was by now in a state of physical and mental collapse. Stooped and grey, he had difficulty in moving and he had developed an uncontrollable trembling on his left side. 'The once hypnotic eyes were now glazed over with weariness and exhaustion,' wrote one observer. 'He was kept on his feet by will alone and the trembling of his limbs tormented him partly because it belied his view that the iron will could achieve anything.'⁷

On 16 April the Soviet offensive to take Berlin began. Resistance to the Russian advance was determined and at times fanatical. The Hitler Youth joined in the final defence of the city, as did the **Volkssturm**, a people's militia of older men and young boys. By the time Berlin fell, more than 100 000 Russians had been killed.

The Russian troops took the *Reichstag* building on 30 April 1945 and hoisted their flag from its roof. On that same afternoon, less than a kilometre away, Hitler committed suicide with a pistol shot to his head.

The war in Europe officially ended one week later on 8 May 1945 with the total and unconditional surrender of all German forces.

Volkssturm

The People's Militia – men aged 16–60, who were enlisted in the closing year of the war to fight the advancing enemy



SOURCE 5.17 The last known picture of Adolf Hitler, with his adjutant Julius Schaub, looking at the ruins of the Reich Chancellery, April 1945



SOURCE 5.18 A Russian soldier sitting in Hitler's living room in the bunker beneath the Chancellery in Berlin in June 1945. The German dictator had committed suicide in this room on 30 April 1945.

The Home Front

One important question is why the combined strength of the Soviets in the East and the United States, Britain and their Allies in the West took so long to defeat Germany. A key part of this German ability to maintain its war effort was a combination of the successful mobilisation of the German people to support the military campaigns and the persistence of the apparatus of terror into the final months and even weeks of the war in Europe.

TOTAL WAR

Rationing was introduced in Germany in 1939, but initially it was not as strict as rationing in Britain. Some in the Nazi leadership had wanted to protect the German people from the full impact of war, and there is evidence that Hitler himself shared the belief that severe restrictions at home could turn people from supporting the war effort.

However, from the start the needs of war received priority and the German economy began the move to a war footing as soon as the war began. After a fall in ammunition production in 1939 caused by reduced steel supplies, new production levels were set for all types of ammunition. Production of weaponry, particularly aircraft and material for the army, increased as more raw materials (including synthetic materials), money and labour were allocated. Despite the Nazi view that women had a duty as wives and mothers, in 1939 more than half of all women aged 15 to 60 were in the German workforce.

By 1943, although armaments production of key resources was still increasing, the German armies were on the defensive. The Allies had landed in Italy and they were preparing to land in France. German cities were being bombed and the German surrender at Stalingrad shocked the nation as 110 000 survivors of the mighty Sixth Army were taken prisoner. The shadow of Stalingrad provided Goebbels with the occasion to deliver a powerful speech at the *Sportpalast* in Berlin, calling on the German people to wage total war.

'Total War'



Bundesarchiv/Fritz R. Weber

SOURCE 5.19 Poster of 1943, 'Hard Times, Hard Duties, Hard Hearts'

Questions

- 1 What technique of persuasion did Goebbels use in the speech below?
- 2 In what way does the poster (Source 5.19) reflect the theme of Goebbels' speech?
- 3 What is the aim of the poster and its intended audience?
- 4 How does the poster achieve its intended effect?

Extracts from the 'Total War' speech by Dr Joseph Goebbels, 18 February 1943

The English allege that the German people have lost their belief in victory. I ask you: Do you believe with the Führer and with us in the final total victory of the German people? I ask you: Are you determined to follow the Führer through thick and thin in the struggle for victory and put up with even the heaviest personal burden? ... The English allege that the German people are no longer in the mood to shoulder the ever-increasing war work demanded by the government. I ask you: Are you and the German people determined, if the Führer orders it, to work ten, twelve, and if necessary fourteen and sixteen hours a day and to give your utmost for victory? ... I ask you: Do you want total war? Do you want it, if necessary, more total and more radical than we can ever imagine? ... If we ever truly believed in victory, it was in this hour of national reflection and inner revival. We see it right ahead of us, we have only to grasp it ... This is the order of the hour. And therefore the motto is *Now let the Nation rise and storm break!*

H Jacobsen, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Chronik und Dokumenten*, Darmstadt, 1961, p. 380.



Alfried Krupp (1907–1967)

Alfried Krupp was born into the family that owned Friedrich Krupp AG, the largest steel and munitions works in Germany. Krupp's mother, Bertha, inherited the company from her father in 1902, although the management of the business was in the hands of her husband Gustav whom she had married in 1906.

During the First World War, the Krupp steelworks were vital for the German war effort and made huge profits producing weaponry and munitions. Defeat and the humiliating Treaty of Versailles turned Alfried Krupp's father, Gustav, into an ardent nationalist and, although initially he opposed the Nazi Party, this changed after Hitler came to power in 1933.

Krupp became a close supporter of the Nazi movement and made generous donations to the party. The suppression of the German trade union movement and the potential for German rearmament forged a bond between the Nazi regime and the Krupp enterprises. In the 1930s the Krupp steelworks had a virtual monopoly on munitions production.

By 1941, as his father's health declined, Alfried Krupp took effective control of the company. Like his father, Alfried Krupp was a supporter of the Nazi movement and even served briefly in the SS. The Nazis were equally supportive of Alfried. In 1943 a special law was issued to restore the Krupp steelworks as a private family concern rather than a public company, so all the profits went to the family. Hitler also appointed Alfried Krupp Minister of the War Economy.

During the war under Alfried Krupp's management, the steelworks based in Essen in the German industrial region of the Ruhr was Germany's largest industrial enterprise. It was the key supplier of munitions and the second largest producer of iron and coal. The company was also allowed to plunder and exploit other industrial enterprises in occupied areas of Europe.

To maintain production levels, foreign civilian workers from other countries and prisoners from concentration camps were used in the factories and coalmines. By 1944 the company exploited more than 100 000 forced labourers and concentration camp inmates. One Krupp factory, Friedrich Krupp Berthawerk AG, named after Alfried Krupp's mother Bertha, specialised in the production of fuses and was built near the camp at Auschwitz.

Alfried Krupp was arrested at the end of the war and in 1947, with 12 other directors of the Krupp company, he stood trial as a war criminal. He was found guilty of exploiting slave



SOURCE 5.20 German industrialist Alfried Krupp under arrest by American troops in 1944. He served a brief prison term before returning to business life in the 1950s.

Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/William Vandivert

continued

continued

labour from concentration camps and prisoners of war, and for plundering industrial works in territories occupied by the Nazis.

Although sentenced to 12 years in prison, Alfried Krupp served only three. He was pardoned in 1951 and his property, which had been forfeited, was returned to him. Krupp returned to business life and remained one of the wealthiest men in Europe. In the years that followed, the Krupp company paid limited compensation to those who had been forced to work in its wartime industries.

HITLER AS A MILITARY COMMANDER

Hitler's overwhelming preoccupation from 1939 to 1945 was waging war. At the end of 1941 Hitler removed Field Marshal von Brauchitsch as the army commander and took the position himself. He believed that the army leadership had been far too cautious and lacked daring and imagination. His dominance and control was such that no major military decision could be made without him.

Germany's early military victories encouraged Hitler to believe in his own abilities and judgement. He was convinced of his sense of mission. But as the war situation turned against Germany from 1943, Hitler became increasingly irrational, to the point where reasoned argument and analysis became impossible. He refused to surrender ground when the military situation was hopeless, ordering troops to stand firm when a more rational strategy would have been withdrawal. He refused to accept the reality of the situation, believing that one could overcome reality by refusing to admit its existence. As always, he held to his belief in the power of the will. What is extraordinary is that to the very end Hitler's hold over the Germany military and the conduct of the war remained absolute.

THE STAUFFENBERG BOMB PLOT, 20 JULY 1944

As the war situation worsened, and as it became clear that Hitler intended to maintain the hopeless struggle until the entire country was annihilated, a group of army officers decided that only the death of Hitler could avert a catastrophe. Unlike other opposition groups, this group had access to Hitler.

On 20 July 1944, one of their number, Count Claus von Stauffenberg, carried a bomb concealed in a briefcase into a military conference that Hitler was attending at his headquarters at Rastenburg in East Prussia. Stauffenberg calmly placed the briefcase under the table less than a metre from where Hitler was standing then left the room. A few



Corbis

SOURCE 5.21 Claus von Stauffenberg, the army officer who carried a bomb into Hitler's meeting room on 20 July 1944. The attempt to assassinate Hitler failed and Stauffenberg was one of the first to be executed.

minutes later an explosion destroyed the meeting place and killed three people. Hitler was injured but survived. The people involved in the conspiracy were arrested, and 200 were executed, some in the most brutal manner. The families of the conspirators and another 5000 people thought to be opposed to the regime went to concentration camps. Among those to die was Field Marshal Rommel, who knew of the conspiracy. He was allowed to poison himself.

GERMAN WARTIME MORALE

The majority of the German people remained loyal to the regime throughout the war. The attempt on Hitler's life in 1944 outraged many Germans and reaffirmed support for the regime.

As the situation grew worse and early victories gave way to defeats, Goebbels came into his own, appearing at rallies and making speeches. He took the lead in urging the German people not to accept defeat. After 1943 even Goebbels could not hide the reality of the worsening war situation and he mastered the tactic of using bad news to reinforce morale. The bombing did not break the will of the German people, and although many now no longer believed in victory, loyalty to the nation refused to allow them to give in. Goebbels and Speer both displayed their true abilities in the last two years of the Reich; Speer by increasing armaments production and Goebbels by strengthening the will of the people. By their actions, these men prolonged the ability of Germany to continue the war.

One issue that has been the subject of increasing historical research is why the war did not end earlier when defeat was so clear. The fact that Germany was a totalitarian state is one factor. Severe new laws were introduced throughout the Reich to deal with the so-called 'enemies of the people' (*Volksschädlinge*). These ranged from people committing major crimes such as sabotage or desertion, to anyone who voiced criticism of the government or the war effort, defeatist talk, listening to foreign broadcasts on the radio, or even jokes about the government. By 1944 the number of crimes that carried the death penalty had increased to more than 40 and a special People's Court frequently imposed the death sentence. The number of summary execution of deserters and *Volksschädlinge*, and the public display of their corpses no doubt continued to reinforce the power of the Nazi Party's terror apparatus. Similarly, the threat of the concentration camp must not be overlooked. In the final phase of the war the populations of these institutions of terror rose markedly.

Fear of the consequences of defeat also hardened German resolve, particularly in the later stages of the war. As Soviet forces entered pre-war German states, such as East Prussia, for example, accounts of mass rape and brutality encouraged German forces to fight a grueling defensive campaign to slow the Soviet advance and so enable civilian refugees to flee the region. While strategically unlikely to have caused reversals of the Soviet advance, millions of ethnic Germans from across Eastern Europe were able to make their way into the German heartland before Soviet troops overwhelmed their homes.

As the German army was forced back and Germany itself was invaded, there was no move from the army leadership to end the conflict. By 1944, as cities were bombed day and night and the enemy was advancing towards the borders of Germany, Hitler no longer appeared in public and refused to visit the ruined cities of his *Reich*. Only after Hitler committed suicide in Berlin on 30 April 1945 was it possible to end the war. Within a week of Hitler's suicide, the Germans accepted unconditional surrender.



Chapter summary

- + Although *Lebensraum* as a policy had existed from the 19th century in Germany, Hitler aimed to solve Germany's quest for living space by a war of conflict in Eastern Europe.
- + Prior to 1939 German foreign policy undid the impositions of the Versailles Treaty and laid the foundations for aggressive actions against Poland, which triggered a war in the West with Britain and France.
- + Germany achieved swift military victories in the West and Northern Europe and the Balkans from mid-1940 to early 1941, and in June 1941 launched an invasion of the Soviet Union, the initial phases of which were successful.
- + At the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Nazi anti-Semitic policy radicalised from a process of ghettoisation to mass extermination. The Wannsee Conference, January 1942, initiated planning for the Final Solution, the systematic killing of European Jews and was followed by the establishment of extermination camps, mainly in Poland. Jews and other peoples whom the Nazis deemed *Untermenschen* (subhuman) were transported to these camps and executed.
- + There has been a significant historical debate as to whether the Final Solution had been planned from the start as part of Nazi policy (the intentionalist argument), or had evolved as a solution to the Jewish question, as millions of Jews fell under the authority of the Third Reich (the functionalist argument).
- + Following the entry of the United States into the war in December 1941 and a series of defeats in the Soviet Union, Germany was finally forced into a full war economy following Goebbels' call for total war.
- + Germany fought on to the very end and the war ended on 8 May 1945 with the total defeat of Germany.

Weblinks

Weblinks relevant to this chapter can be found at <http://nmh.nelsonnet.com.au/germany>.

Further resources

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Chapter review activities

- 1 Define the following terms:

<i>Lebensraum</i>	appeasement
<i>Blitzkrieg</i>	<i>Luftwaffe</i>
<i>Volkssturm</i>	
- 2 Place these events in what you believe are their order of importance as key turning points in the Second World War. Select one of these events and prepare an extended response explaining why it was a turning point of the war:
 - the D-Day landing
 - Germany declared war on the United States
 - the Battle of Britain
 - Germany invaded the Soviet Union
 - the Battle of Stalingrad.
- 3 Why was there so little resistance to Hitler even when it was clear that the war effort was going so badly? Select one instance when an attempt was made to remove Hitler and prepare a multimedia presentation on both the event and the consequences.
- 4 Prepare a two-column table with the headings ‘Defeated Germany 1918/19’ and ‘Defeated Germany 1945/46’. In each column, prepare summary points that outline how different the treatment was that Germany received in 1918–1919 and 1945–1946.



- 5 Prepare a table with two columns, with the headings 'Intentionalist historians' and 'Functionalist historians'. Make a list of the main points these two historical interpretations offer on the Holocaust.
- 6 Based on your research, prepare a report on the main issues discussed at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.

Essay questions

- 7 The story of Germany in the Second World War was one of 'swift, unstoppable victories, followed by slow inevitable defeat'. To what degree do you agree with this statement?
- 8 How important was Hitler's leadership during the war years 1939–45?
- 9 Explain the development of racist policies in Germany after 1933.

CONCLUSION

*Germany
1918–1945*

DEM DEUTSCHEN VOLKE

The Second World War was fought to destroy the Nazi regime. This goal was achieved. Nazism died with Hitler. The surviving leaders of Hitler's *Reich* were rounded up and put on trial, and many of them were executed. But the legacy of the Nazi regime could not be erased so easily. The deliberate policy of genocide – the murder of approximately six million European Jews under the cover of the Second World War – stands as an eternal crime in the annals of human history.

Unlike in 1918, Germany did not survive as a united nation. Seventy-five years earlier, in 1871, Bismarck had created the unified Germany. The Second World War ended this unity, and defeated Germany was occupied and divided into four zones by the four major victorious powers – the Soviet Union, the United States of America, Britain and France. The last of these occupying troops were not to leave German soil until 1990.

One of the major goals of the Nazi movement had been to destroy Soviet Russia and drive German power into the East. In 1945 the reverse happened. One of the results of Germany's defeat was that half of Europe and half of Germany now lay effectively under the control of the Soviet Union. Instead of the German army driving east, the Red Army had driven west.

The Second World War was, in fact, won by the two great superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, one the strongest capitalist powers and a great democracy, the other a communist state with a totalitarian system of government. The Soviet Union established its control over most of Eastern Europe, and the United States provided military and economic support for the nations of Western Europe. The map of Europe was changed, and out of the 'hot' war of 1939–45 was born the Cold War that would last until 1991 when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In 1949, two German nations were established upon the ruins of the old Germany – the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), with American and Western support, and the German Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany), controlled from the Soviet Union. The city of Berlin was divided into four sectors, with East Berlin under Soviet control and Britain, the United States and France controlling the three western sectors.

For the next 40 years (1949 to 1990), the two German nations survived, backed by the victorious powers of the Second World War that had created them. Democracy, which all Germans had lost in 1933, was restored to the West Germans. East Germany became a communist state.

In this way, the impact of the 12 years of Nazi Germany did not die with its defeat. That impact was finally erased with the momentous events that swept Europe in 1989 and 1990. In 1989, a few months after celebrating the 40th anniversary of its creation, the East German Government collapsed. The barriers that divided East Germany and West Germany, including the Berlin Wall, were torn down. The year 1990 was a turning point in German history that was as important as 1871, 1918, 1933 or 1945. Germany once again became a unified nation.

It was fitting that the celebrations to mark the reunification of Germany in October 1990 were centered on the old *Reichstag* building in Berlin, because more than any other building it has come to symbolise modern German history. From its balcony in 1918, Scheidemann declared the Weimar Republic, and it became the home of Germany's troubled democracy after the First World War. In 1933 it was the fire in the *Reichstag* that the Nazis used to set in train the

◀ The *Reichstag* in Berlin today

events that would establish Hitler and his movement in absolute power. Not unexpectedly, this home of German democracy would remain ruined and unused during the Third Reich. Fittingly, it was from the top of the *Reichstag* in May 1945 that Soviet soldiers hoisted the Soviet flag, announcing the end of the Nazi era. In the long years of the Cold War, the *Reichstag* remained empty for a time and was then converted into a museum. The Berlin Wall, the physical symbol of the Cold War, passed only a few metres behind the famous structure. However, the *Reichstag* building, which had seen the collapse of democracy and Nazism, survived to see the collapse of communism as well.

In 1990 the decision was made to make the *Reichstag* once again the home of the German Parliament. The building was restored and modernised and the proud inscription on the front of the building, *Dem Deutschen Volke* (To the German People), found new meaning when in 1999 the German Parliament and the democratic process returned to the building. Amid great celebrations in front of the *Reichstag*, where democracy had triumphed in the Weimar era and then been destroyed by the Nazis, a new chapter in Germany's extraordinary history began.

EXERCISE

Create a timeline, on paper or electronically, of the 10 most significant events in German history between 1918 and 1945. Your timeline could include political, social, cultural or economic developments during that period.

In note form, explain why you have identified these key events as significant.

Share your timeline and notes with classmates. Discuss similarities and differences between the events on your timelines and the reasons you have made your selections.

In light of this discussion, would you change any of your choices? In a brief paragraph explain why.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 The historian Mary Fulbrook described Germany as ‘the divided nation’. In what ways, between 1918 and 1945, might Germany be considered to be socially and politically divided?
- 2 To what extent were there continuities and discontinuities in German history between 1918 and 1945?
- 3 In what way were the characteristic features of German history during the Weimar Republic (1919–1933) different from those of the Third Reich (1933–1945) that followed?
- 4 The period of German history from 1918 to 1945 began and ended in military defeat. How important was militarism and the role of the armed forces in Germany from 1918 to 1945?
- 5 To what degree could it be argued that the period of German history from 1918 to 1945 was a time defined by the rise and fall of conflicting ideologies?

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