

I.B History- Single Party States

Nazi Germany- Notes

2007

Background

The First World War, the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the prevailing German ambivalence about electoral politics weakened the Weimar Republic from its inception. Hyperinflation and political violence between 1918 and 1923 left the German population with a feeling of vulnerability and instability that lingered throughout the more stable period of 1924-29. When the Great Depression put millions out of work and paralysed the Reichstag, a desire for a strong hand and order intensified. At a time when capitalist-democracy seemed to be failing, people looked to extreme movements, such as fascism and communism, throughout Europe. Conservative politicians, eager to win popular support, began to court the Nazi Party, culminating with Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933.

The Nazi Party was one of many extremist nationalist groups springing up in Germany after the First World War. Its success was due largely to the party's unity, based on personal loyalty to its leader, Adolf Hitler, who presented a vision of a strong, united Germany. Their ability to mix revolutionary dynamism with conservative values won the Nazis a wide popular following after 1928 among those disillusioned with traditional elites. Underestimated by conservative politicians, Hitler was able to establish a dictatorship shortly after his appointment as chancellor by using state power to terrorise any who might dissent. Widespread disdain for parliamentary politics in Germany allowed Hitler to neutralise the Reichstag and eliminate opposing political parties with ease; the death of President Paul von Hindenburg in 1934 and subsequent endorsement by the army removed the last resistance to the Nazis' complete dictatorship.

Rise in detail

- To understand the Nazis' success, one must look to Germany's political and social heritage, the chaos enveloping Germany after the First World War, the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the impact of the Great Depression.
- The Nazis owed a great deal to the chaotic situation in Germany after 1918 and to the mixed political legacy inherited by the new Weimar Republic. The harsh terms imposed on Germany by England and France in the Treaty of Versailles stripped the nation of a significant portion of its territory, undermined the possibility of a quick economic recovery and left the disarmed German people feeling humiliated and powerless. These factors only accentuated the political weakness of the Weimar Republic and intensified existing tensions between different social groups.
- Numerous anti-democratic movements on the right and left challenged the legitimacy of the Weimar state, particularly between 1919 and 1923. The Nazi Party (officially the National Socialist German Workers' Party), founded in 1919, was one such group. A previously unknown veteran, Adolf Hitler, swiftly rose to become this fringe group's undisputed leader, promoting an ideology that blended

- an extreme form of nationalism, anti-Semitism, militarism, the promise of reintegrating the polarised segments of German society and a leadership cult.
- After a failed 1923 coup attempt and subsequent imprisonment, Hitler re-established the Nazi Party in 1925 and began to focus on building a mass organisation that could achieve electoral success. After a slow start, the Nazis' political clout began to grow with the onset of the **Great Depression in 1929**.
 - The worst prolonged worldwide economic crisis in modern history, the Depression created not only economic, but also political and cultural problems.
 - The Depression undermined the Weimar political system in a number of ways. One was the paralysis it caused in the Reichstag. Reported unemployment leapt from 1.6 million in October 1929 to over 6 million by 1932; these figures did not include millions of others working only part-time or who no longer bothered to register as unemployed with the state. This increase in those out of work put an enormous strain on the social welfare system that had been one of the signal features of the Weimar state, and the Reichstag soon became paralysed over the questions of taxation and benefits.
 - It was this inability to pass a budget in 1930 that allowed President Hindenburg to declare a state of emergency and to invoke Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, beginning a three-year period of presidential rule.
 - Some voters viewed capitalism as the cause of their misery, others reviled the inability of the democratic political system to bring an end to the crisis. Large segments of the population became increasingly hostile towards capitalism and/or democracy, a fact that was reflected in the rising support for the Nazis and Communists. While unemployed workers primarily threw their support behind the KPD, many middle-class onlookers were also unnerved by the chaos unfolding around them. Recalling the instability of the early 1920s, they feared a new round of hyperinflation or the long-dreaded socialist revolution. Their anxiety left them susceptible to the Nazis' promises to prevent revolution and restore stability through decisive action.
 - Hitler's presentation of himself as a strong and decisive leader and of the Nazi Party as 'the only true all-German movement that stood above party, class and faction' became particularly appealing to many voters'. The Nazis' also presented themselves as both the restorers of 'traditional German' values and as a revolutionary movement which would apply dynamic new solutions. Their focus on action and interest in mixing new technologies with allegedly traditional values set them apart from other conservative parties, as did their willingness to use modern propaganda techniques to mobilise a large-scale following.
 - The rush of voters to the anti-democratic parties of the left and right undermined any chance the Reichstag had of agreeing on a set of policies to counteract the effects of the Depression, sealing the Republic's fate. The Reichstag's prolonged impotence and years of rule by chancellors with little popular support destroyed whatever lingering legitimacy the Weimar system had among wide segments of the population, making it easier for many Germans to accept Hitler's speedy dismantling of the system in 1933.
 - A handful of conservative German politicians played a direct role in the demise of the Weimar state and Hitler's appointment as chancellor. Once the period of presidential rule (through Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution) began in 1930, power fell increasingly into the hands of a group of politicians, such as General Schleicher, who operated behind the scenes, steadily eroding the Reichstag's

influence and power. The concentration of power in President Hindenburg's hands allowed those around him, including Schleicher, and later Fritz von Papen, to attain power even though they lacked any popular support. Believing he could manipulate Hitler, it was Papen who convinced a reluctant Hindenburg to make the Nazi leader chancellor. Papen and other conservatives gave little attention to Hitler's stated agenda, and it was their 'political blindness and blunders' that gave him the opportunity to impose his vision on Germany. Because the Nazis' electoral popularity was starting to wane in early 1933, it was unlikely that Hitler would have come to power if Papen had not pushed to have him named chancellor. Papen's cabinet was dominated by members of more traditional conservative parties, but they quickly found themselves outmanoeuvred by Hitler and his associates; by 1934, the Nazis had complete control over the German state, while Papen was reduced to the post of ambassador to Austria.

The Legacy of the Weimar government in explaining initial support for Nazi regime: acceptance of, and support for, Nazi rule among different social, economic and religious groups

- Germany became a Parliamentary Republic in November 1918 following the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II.
- The Republic survived a period of crisis 1919-23, enjoyed a fragile recovery 1924-29, but had collapsed by the end of 1932.
- The Republic was seen by many Germans as a product of Germany's defeat in World War One.
- Germany's defeat in war was never accepted by many Germans who believed that their country had been 'stabbed in the back' by unpatriotic Liberals, Pacifists and Jews. The new Republic was therefore seen as part of a conspiracy.
- The Republic was seen as an alien institution imposed by Germany's enemies. German diplomats were barred from the peace negotiations at Versailles in 1919.
- Many Germans felt that they had no obligation to accept democracy as part of a dictated peace (or 'Diktat').
- The Republic never achieved lasting political stability. Governments were weak, short-lived coalitions.
- There were 20 Governments from 1919 to 1932. This was mainly due to the system of proportional representation which made it difficult for any one party from winning a clear majority in the Reichstag (parliament).
- Article 24 allowed the President to dismiss the government whilst Article 48 gave emergency powers to the President. Article 48 also undermined Governments by allowing the President to rule by Decree without reference to the Reichstag.

- Weimar Governments were blamed for the economic crises, which plagued Germany 1919-1932. Germany suffered hyperinflation in 1923, and high levels of unemployment throughout the 1920s.
- An agricultural depression caused widespread poverty in the countryside in 1929 and there was massive unemployment following the Wall Street Crash in 1929. By 1932 unemployment had risen to six million.

How did the Nazis exploit the unpopularity of the Weimar Republic in 1932-33?

- The Nazis deliberately made different promises to different sections of German society. All promises were vague and contained no accurate details. They made no attempt to reconcile conflicting claims.
- They promised to rescue bankrupted peasant farmers and to reverse the long-term drift from the land to the cities.
- They promised to generate economic recovery and to create full employment.
- They appeared to be the only small party strong enough to prevent a communist revolution and end the anarchy on the streets, and to remove the threat from the communists.
- They appealed to German nationalism by challenging the Treaty of Versailles.
- They offered strong leadership and stable government.
- The Nazis made particular efforts to appeal to the youth of Germany by attempting to represent themselves as a 'new party' and the 'future'.
- Popular, simplistic policies were powerfully advertised by a well-organised propaganda machine led by Josef Goebbels. The Nazis organised a relentless programme of meetings, rallies and demonstrations 1929-1932.
- The Nazis used their private army the Sturm Abteilungen (SA or Storm-troopers) to intimidate their political opponents, especially the communists.
- Hitler was a charismatic figure, able to impress crowds by his theatrical and demagogic style of leadership.

Nazi Support in 1933

- The Nazis were able to win support from all social groups.
- They won their greatest support from the lower middle classes, skilled workers and peasant farmers.
- The Nazis won less support from the social elites, the unskilled workers, and the unemployed.

- The Nazis grew more popular among Protestants, less so from Catholics.
- The Nazis won support in particular from Germans over 60 and from young people aged 18-24.

Why did the Nazis appeal to the Lower Middle Class ('Mittelstand')?

- Many shopkeepers, clerks, professionals, craftsmen had been ruined by the hyperinflation of 1923.
- They thought that the Weimar Republic had been too left wing and had favoured Trade Unions.
- They resented 'Big Business' and the growth of large supermarkets, often owned by Jews.
- They feared economic ruin following the Great Depression.
- They feared a Communist Revolution.
- Many hated the artistic modernism and moral permissiveness of the 1920s.

Why did the Nazis appeal to peasant farmers?

- Farmers believed that Weimar Governments had favoured urban workers.
- Many farmers had left the land as farm incomes declines during the 1920s.
- Many farmers, particularly in Northern Germany had been ruined by the agricultural depression after 1928.
- Farmers feared that their lands would be collectivised following a Communist Revolution.
- The Nazis exploited farmers' conservative instincts by preaching their ideology of 'blood and soil'.

Why did the Nazis appeal to skilled workers?

- Skilled workers were usually not represented by Trade Unions or by the Social Democrats.
- The income of skilled workers increased less than that of unskilled in the 1920s.
- The development of 'new industries', which used assembly line techniques, had reduced the demand for skilled workers.
- Skilled workers were threatened by mass unemployment after 1929.

- Skilled workers feared a Communist Revolution more than the unskilled because they feared that socialist policies would lead to a levelling down of incomes.

Why did the Nazis appeal more strongly to Protestants?

- Protestants believed that the Catholic Centre Party (Zentrum) had been too powerful during the Weimar Republic.
- The Centre Party had been part of the coalition governments during the Weimar period.
- Protestants feared an attack on the church if the communists came to power.
- Some Protestants were anti-Semitic.
- Protestants identified more strongly with German nationalism.

The Nazis in power

Consolidation

- When they assumed power in 1933, the Nazis immediately took a number of steps that led to the establishment of a quasi-totalitarian state. Neglect of legal standards only increased after the institution of presidential rule in 1930. Chancellors Brüning, Papen and Schleicher all acted on occasion against both the letter and spirit of the Weimar Constitution. The most striking example of this was Papen's 1932 'coup' against the socialist-led coalition government of Prussia, which was dissolved under questionable circumstances and replaced by centrally appointed officials. This slow erosion of legal norms accelerated quickly, both in quality and quantity, after Hitler came to power in 1933.
- The **Enabling Act** coerced dissolution of all other political parties removed most political constraints on the Nazis. Only Hindenburg, who still commanded the army's loyalty and who could theoretically remove Hitler as chancellor, blocked Hitler's absolute dictatorship. Although the Enabling Act contained a clause explicitly guaranteeing the separation of the offices of chancellor and president, Hitler did not hesitate to merge them after Hindenburg's death, giving him absolute political authority
- Equally dramatic was the Nazis' re-orientation of the German legal system after 1933. The function of law was now 'to protect and serve the collective interests of the national community' against alien elements. Any act taken by state authorities to defend the 'national community' against the threat posed by Marxists, Jews and other 'questionable' groups were justified in this manner. Successive laws were passed that deprived various groups, including the mentally and physically ill, of their civil rights; the loss of their civil rights was for many 'defective' Aryans a prelude to their eventual murder.
- In 1935, Jews were stripped of their citizenship. Judges were empowered to make subjective decisions about those taken to court; habitual criminals and political dissidents could be detained on the basis of the threat they allegedly posed,

- regardless of whether they had broken any laws. Judges and policemen who disagreed with this approach were forced out of their positions. The Nazis never bothered drawing up a new legal code or constitution—they simply passed laws, often retrospectively, to legitimise their actions.
- The most blatant case of this occurred in July 3, 1934, following the Night of the Long Knives. After the SS slaughtered nearly one hundred unruly SA leaders and perceived political opponents, the government passed a 'Law for the Emergency Defence of the State' that retroactively legalised the cold-blooded murders.
 - The German population reacted passively to the Nazis' steady erosion of the rule of law. Most Germans did not mind the Nazis' elimination of electoral democracy, especially since it appeared that the Nazis, unlike the Reichstag, had been able to take vigorous steps to end the Depression and eliminate the 'socialist threat'. Indeed, many saw it as a fair trade-off for social order. Aside from their inability to criticise the party or state, most Germans were not immediately affected by the judicial shift taking place, making it easier to ignore.
 - The Nazis quickly eliminated the autonomy of judicial and police bodies, transforming them into pliant tools willing to carry out Nazi policies. All media were subordinated to state control and made, to a greater or lesser degree, propaganda outlets. Strict censorship was instituted, as were limits on free speech and public assembly. Independent organisations—ranging from bowling clubs to charity organisations to singing clubs—were forced to disband, to accept new Nazi leadership, or to merge with larger Nazi-controlled organisations in a process known as 'Gleichschaltung' ('co-ordination'). The only significant exceptions to this were churches and some church-affiliated groups. 'Co-ordination' served a dual purpose: it eradicated any alternative centres of community identity, destroying civil society in Germany; and it politicised all remaining organisations, exposing their participants to Nazi propaganda and ideals and theoretically accelerating their integration into the 'national community'.
 - A final case of self-interest abetting the Nazis' consolidation of power concerned the German military leadership. The German army was the last independent source of power in Germany after the spring of 1933 and the only obstacle blocking Hitler's complete domination of the state. Initially, many German generals distrusted the Nazis, particularly because of the pretensions of the SA, whose leader, Ernst Röhm, wanted to replace the traditional military with his 'revolutionary units'. Once Hitler had Röhm and other radical SA leaders killed in June 1934, and demonstrated his willingness to defend the army's desire for rearmament and growth, military leaders and other conservatives 'lined up behind Hitler'. When Hindenburg died in August 1934, military leaders did not hesitate to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler as the new German president, cementing the Nazis' dictatorship over Germany. Later, when Hitler over-ruled his generals and made poor military decisions during the Second World War, many officers would come to regret this action.

How did the Nazis establish their dictatorship in 1933?

- Hitler was invited by President von Hindenburg to become Chancellor on 30th January 1933.
- The cabinet included three Nazis: Hitler himself with Frick as Interior Minister, Goering as Minister without Specific Responsibility. The others, like Vice-Chancellor von Papen, were conservatives.
- Goering, as Minister-President of Prussia, drafted Nazi stormtroopers into the police force.
- Hitler ordered new elections to be held in March and began a campaign of intimidation and propaganda.
- Newspapers and radios were censored by the propaganda ministry led by Goebbels.
- Hitler blamed the Reichstag fire on 27th February on the Communists and introduced a law 'for the Protection of People and State' which established a State of Emergency on 28th February. This gave unlimited powers of arrest of Nazi opponents, especially Communists and Socialists.
- Concentration camps such as Dachau, Munich and Sachsenhausen near Berlin were opened to imprison and torture Nazi political opponents and 'anti social' groups such as tramps, drunks and homosexuals.
- The Nazis won 43.9% in the Elections on 5th March. To secure a majority they formed an alliance with the German Nationalist Party (DNVP).
- On 21st March, the Nazis staged an elaborate Commemoration Service at the garrison church at Potsdam to demonstrate their democratic respectability and conservative principles.
- With the support of the Centre Party, Hitler secured the passage of the Enabling Act (23rd March) through the Reichstag. This gave the Nazis dictatorial powers. This gave Hitler the power to by-pass the Reichstag and make laws without its consent for four years. It was passed with the help of the Nationalists and with the Reichstag building surrounded by armed SA members.
- Local government was taken over by the Nazis; each of the 18 provinces was given a Nazi governor, April, 1933. Local parliaments were abolished.
- Only Nazis could become civil servants, judges.
- Trade unions were abolished in May 1933.
- All other parties were banned, July 1933. Their leaders were arrested, or fled abroad. The first concentration camp, at Dachau, was set up for political opponents in 1933.

- In August 1934 Hindenburg died. Hitler becomes President and Chancellor combined, calling himself simply, The Leader – Der Fuhrer. The army swore its oath of loyalty to Hitler, personally.

How did the Nazis use Terror?

- Nazi Stormtroopers had beaten and killed their opponents in the election campaigns 1930-1932.
- Stormtroopers were drafted into the Prussian Police Force in February 1933 and continued to bully opponents.
- Concentration camps such as Dachau near Munich and Sachsenhausen near Berlin were opened to imprison and torture Nazi political opponents and 'anti socials'.
- The Secret State Police (Gestapo) was formed in April 1933 to eliminate all dissent.
- The SS (Schutzstaffel) led by Heinrich Himmler became the main instrument of Nazi Terror.
- Rohm and the leadership of the Stormtroopers were purged following the Night of the Long Knives (30th June 1934) by the SS.

The Night of the Long Knives

Hitler purged Rohm and other leaders of the Stormtroopers as well as leading Conservative opponents such as General von Schleicher, Jung and von Bose.

Why did Hitler purge his Opponents?

- Hitler feared that his dictatorship was challenged by Rohm who claimed to lead three million Stormtroopers.
- Rohm's ideas of a 'Second Revolution' to destroy the social elites and to replace the army by a 'Peoples Army' alienated Hitler's conservative political and business allies who were vital at this stage of his dictatorship.
- The Generals demanded the destruction of the Stormtroopers as a precondition of their co-operation with rearmament. General von Brauschitsch gave Hitler a blunt ultimatum to this effect in May 1934.
- President von Hindenburg and Vice-Chancellor von Papen condemned the brutality and lawlessness of the Stormtroopers and threatened to declare Martial Law.
- Hitler also feared a challenge from the Conservatives on the death of Hindenburg. He was particularly alarmed by von Papen's speech at Marburg in June 1934, which denounced the lawlessness on the streets.

How did Hitler purge his Opponents?

- Goering and Himmler drew up death lists of all suspected opponents under the codename 'Operation Hummingbird'.
- Hitler ordered Rohm to disband the Stormtroopers for the summer.
- Whilst on retreat at Bad Weissee in Bavaria the SS mounted a raid to arrest SA leaders.
- Goering produced fabricated evidence accusing SA leaders of political subversion and sexual debauchery.
- Conservative opponents, such as von Scheicher, were shot by SS officers in Berlin.
- The Reichstag accepted and supported Hitler's actions.

Why was the Purge so important?

- It resolved Hitler's political crisis and secured his dictatorship.
- It broke any remaining moral or legal restraints in the dictatorship.
- It established the power of the SS.
- It paralysed opposition from the conservatives.
- It secured Hitler's alliance with the army. This was important following the death of President Hindenburg on 2nd August 1934.
- On the death of Hindenburg, Hitler abolished the position of President and became Head of State or Fuhrer of Germany.
- The army agreed to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler as Head of State.
- In a plebiscite on 19th August 90% of Germans voted in favour of Hitler's position as Head of State.
- The SS absorbed all police functions in 1936. The SS organised the purge of dissident Generals, Blomberg and Fritsch in February 1938.

The Economy

- In addition to creating circumstances conducive to the Nazis' political style, the Depression also provided them with opportunities to build popular support after they assumed power.
- The Nazis took credit for a number of popular public works projects that had been designed by previous governments, but which were in only the early stages of implementation in January 1933. Although unemployment continued to be a

problem for several years, a good proportion of those without work found at least temporary jobs in 1933, creating the perception that decisive action was being taken and removing the spectre of economic collapse that had haunted the middle class before 1933.

- The Nazis also took advantage of the Depression to advance their social agenda. Charitable organisations, like all others, were 'co-ordinated' in the summer of 1933. The Nazis then launched a series of charitable campaigns designed to demonstrate the solidarity of Germans of all classes as part of the 'national community'. Nazi supporters and those of 'pure Aryan blood' were given preference by Nazi-controlled charities, while 'racial aliens' and political dissidents were carefully excluded.
- The Nazis attempted to revive the economy, provide funds for rearmament and make Germany self-sufficient so that it would not be dependent on foreign imports in time of war. To achieve these aims, economic minister Hjalmar Schacht introduced his 'New Plan', which strictly controlled imports into Germany by only allocating foreign exchange for government purchase of essential items. Combined with public work schemes such as the building of *Autobahnen* (highways), these measures resulted in a dramatic decrease in unemployment, from 6 million in 1933 to 302,000 in January 1939. In 1936, the second Four Year Plan was introduced, which aimed to put the economy on a war footing and to replace imported raw materials with German-made synthetics. Although these schemes seemed impressive, they were enacted with little or no regard for social freedoms or basic human rights. By 1939, Germany still imported 33 per cent of the raw materials it needed, and the German economy was not able to sustain the massive drain on resources as the Second World War progressed.

Economic policies and rearmament

The Labour Service

- Before the Nazis came to power the National Labour Service had been started. This used government money to provide jobs for the unemployed, building bridges, roads and forests.
- The Nazis took up and expanded these schemes. Hitler was especially keen on the building of the first motorways, the *Autobahns*.
- All men had to spend six months in the Labour Service. They only earned about 50p a week, wore uniforms and marched like soldiers. Much of the work was done by hand and not by machinery. This meant that there were more jobs.

Rearmament

- German re-armament gave a huge boost to industry, which soon had millions of new jobs. At first secretly, then quite openly, Hitler ordered the building of submarines, aircraft and tanks. This was quite contrary to the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
- The army was increased from 100,000 to 1,400,000 by 1939.

Other methods

- Many people were removed from the list of unemployed, for example Jews, many women and the young men in the National Labour Front.
- By 1936 recorded unemployment was down from 6 million to 1 million; by 1938 industry was short of workers and during the Second World War workers were forced into German factories from all the countries the Nazis had overrun.

Self-sufficiency

- Hitler wanted the German economy to be self-sufficient so that it would be able to operate even in a war. Foreign imports were restricted and research put into finding substitutes for rubber, petrol, coffee and cotton. This policy was known as Autarky.

Women

- On the one hand, they wanted to return women to a more traditional role within the home as mothers and homemakers. On the other hand, the new economy demanded the participation of women in the workforce. As a result, the Nazis pursued contradictory policies in this field—in the mid-1930s, some Nazi organisations urged women to stay at home and bear as many children as possible, while others tried to recruit women into the workplace.
- The Nazi Party was a man's party. There were no women in senior positions. Hitler and the Nazis did not believe in equality for the sexes. Women had to stay at home, produce more children and look after the family. This was for both racial reasons, to produce more racially-pure Germans, and economic reasons, to solve unemployment by removing women from the labour market.
- There was a lot of propaganda about the ideal German family. Photographs and posters showed the woman looking after the children and the man going out to work and protecting the wife.
- Women were forced to give up work when they got married. They could not be civil servants, lawyers, judges or doctors.
- Men were to be preferred to women in job applications.
- Couples received a loan of 1,000 marks on getting married. Less and less of this loan had to be paid back the more children you had.
- Women with hereditary diseases or mental illness were sterilised so as to keep the German race 'pure'. Unmarried women could volunteer to have a child by a 'pure Aryan' SS member.

- Nazi propaganda discouraged wearing make-up, high heels, perfume, smoking in public.
- Women's roles can be summarised as three 'Ks' Kinder, Kirche, Kuche, children, church, cooking (or kitchen).

Leadership Cult

- The leadership cult that developed around Adolf Hitler, first within the Nazi Party, then in Germany in general, played a key role in the establishment of the Nazi regime.
- Personal loyalty to Hitler and a few core beliefs he stood for—'Aryan' racial superiority, anti-communism, anti-Semitism, extreme nationalism—were the only things they had in common.
- By making loyalty to Hitler the essence of party membership, they were able to suppress differences and act as a unified body at a time when most radical movements were splintering into tiny factions over doctrinal issues. By 1926, the party had accepted the Führerprinzip ('leadership principle'), which rejected internal party democracy and placed all power in a central apparatus controlled by Hitler, whose authority was acknowledged as absolute.
- Although some Nazi leaders helped to propagate the Hitler cult for practical reasons, most shared Goebbels's belief that Hitler was a mystical genius who alone could save Germany. As a result, the very idea of challenging Hitler's authority within the party was unthinkable. Those who disagreed with his tactics could either stifle their dissent or leave the party. This was a crucial factor in December 1932, when Chancellor Schleicher approached Gregor Strasser and tried to convince him to join his government, despite the fact that Hitler was adamant that no Nazi join a cabinet in which he was not chancellor. Although he disagreed bitterly with Hitler's stance, Strasser, unlike Schleicher, understood that no Nazis would follow him out of the party; Strasser chose instead to resign his party post and go into seclusion. Hitler's desire to rid himself of any potential rivals, real or imagined, was a key factor in motivating the Night of the Long Knives, in which Strasser and SA Chief Ernst Röhm, who also questioned Hitler's absolute authority, both lost their lives.
- This approach to leadership helped to bolster Hitler's reputation outside the party. It gave outsiders the impression that the party was a unified, cohesive body that acted decisively under the command of a strong leader—an important factor in attracting people's support during the difficult days of the Depression. His rejection of 'democratic nonsense' appealed to people who wanted results, not debates. He was also a compelling speaker whose ability to present a vision of a strong Germany was extremely appealing, first during the chaotic period after the First World War, and again during the Depression.
- After Hitler was named chancellor, the Nazi Party used the full power of the state to reinforce his popularity, making the Hitler cult an important part of the Nazi state. Loyalty to Hitler was now meant to bind together the German people, just as it bound the Nazi Party together. Hitler's bold foreign policy moves during the middle of the decade won wide support among a population that felt it had been humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler's renunciation of Versailles, expansion of the German army, re-militarisation of the Rhineland and reintegration of Saar back into Germany were all highly popular and garnered widespread support from the populace.

Propaganda/Mass Mobilisation

- The widespread use of propaganda was an essential tool for the Nazis both before and after 1933. Effective propaganda was necessary to mobilise large segments of the population and make them enthusiastic participants in Hitler's vision for the reshaping of Germany.
- Hitler took propaganda very seriously. He believed that Germany's loss in the First World War had been due to a failure of morale on the home front that undermined the army's will to fight (the 'stab-in-the-back' theory.)
- Propaganda was the perfect weapon for the anti-democratic Nazis, who despised rational debate and reasoned appeals. They mastered the art of using rhetoric and appearance to achieve a visceral, emotional impact on an audience.
- Although this emphasis on spectacle and emotionally stirring, but empty, rhetoric was a constant element of Nazi propaganda, there were important differences in how the Nazis approached audiences before and after January 1933. Under the direction of Josef Goebbels, the party had developed a very sophisticated approach to propaganda between 1928 and 1932. Central party propagandists wrote pamphlets and trained speakers to address a variety of subjects. Local party organisations could then use those pamphlets and speakers likely to strike a chord with local audiences and ignore those that did not. Local groups could cater to their community's interests, and the central party organisation could gather valuable information about what themes were resonating throughout the nation, allowing it to refine its overall message. This system allowed the Nazis to appear to be all things to all people, a task made easier by the fact that they did not actually have to govern.
- After January 1933, the Nazis employed the power of the state to increase the scope of their propaganda efforts, flooding German society under a torrent of images and messages. The Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda, under the control of Goebbels, was founded in March 1933. Some media sources, such as radio, were already under state control and supervisory bodies were created to oversee the work of the rest, including newspapers, theatre, music, art and film.
- While the Nazis did not directly dictate the content of all German media, they did keep a careful eye on it and pressured artists and journalists to address those themes the Nazis believed were important. Ironically, even as the power of the Nazi propaganda machine grew, its effectiveness lessened. With power secured, Nazi leaders began to lose interest in input from below—all propaganda messages were now dictated from above, with little concern for local interests.
- After 1933, the Nazis created or expanded special organisations designed to involve different demographic groups in their movement: the Hitler Youth for teenage boys, the League of German Girls for their female counterparts, the National Socialist Women's Organisation for women and the German Labour Front for working-class men, to name just a few. These groups subsumed all other competitors during the process of 'co-ordination'. Their purpose was to instil 'Aryan' values in their members, and propaganda messages were built into every

activity; these activities, in turn, occupied most of their participants' 'free' time, immersing them in the Nazis' agenda. At the same time, these bodies also served as propaganda tools aimed at the broader population. The Nazis' ability to bring out thousands of members and supporters before 1933, and tens, if not hundreds, of thousands after 1933, helped to project the Nazis' desired image of strength and unity to the German people. The impact of such spectacles can be seen in Leni Riefenstahl's classic propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, which presents scene after scene of thousands of Germans from throughout the country paying homage to Hitler at the party's 1934 Nuremberg rally, reinforcing Hitler's slogan 'One people, one nation, one leader'.

How did the Nazis use Propaganda?

- Journalists were purged, newspapers were controlled by the Nazi agency DNB, which held daily press briefings.
- Radio broadcasts offered direct access to the home. Cheap radios were produced so that all families could hear the Nazi message.
- Posters in trams and on streets.
- Films directed by Leni Riefenstahl such as 'Triumph of the Will' (1935) and 'Olympia' (1938).
- Stage-managed events such as the Day at Potsdam (March 1933), the Book-burning (May 1933), the Berlin Olympics (1936) were used to create and bolster the image of the Nazis.
- A regular programme of rallies, demonstrations, processions developed to catch the attention of the German people and maintain support.
- Ritual: Celebration of Nazi Days, the Nazi Salute, Horst Wessel Song.
- State paternalism managed through 'Strength Through Joy', 'Beauty of Labour', 'Winterhelp'.
- Control of teachers, syllabus and youth groups.
- Manipulation of Art, Music and Architecture.

How successful was Nazi Propaganda?

- Propaganda was powerful because it enjoyed a state monopoly, was skilfully deployed and because it often reinforced popular prejudices.
- Propaganda was effective in securing the consolidation of the dictatorship, demonstrating state paternalism and reinforcing Nazi ideas for the family and young people.

- Propaganda also encouraged a growing sense of Nationalism and the marginalisation of the Jews.
- For many Germans, propaganda dulled their senses and lulled them into a sense of security or helplessness.
- There were, however, limits to the success of propaganda. The Germans were a highly educated and cultured nation and propaganda failed when it was crude or oppressive.
- Many Germans remained cynical or unconvinced. There was little enthusiasm for the 'Anschluss' with Austria in 1938 or for the attack on Jews during Crystal Night in 1938 or for a European War in 1939.

Opposition to the Nazi dictatorship 1933 – 1939

There was no organised nation-wide opposition to the dictatorship. Those Germans who opposed Hitler did so in small isolated and uncoordinated groups.

Why did some Germans attempt to resist the Nazis?

- Communists and socialists were ideologically opposed to the Nazis and became the regime's first victims following the Emergency Decree of February 1933.
- Some conservatives realised that von Papen's attempt to control Hitler and then to eject him had failed. Vice-chancellor von Papen headed a small group of conservative dissidents which gathered information cataloguing the regime's illegality.
- In June 1933 von Papen denounced the brutality of the regime at Marburg.
- Church leaders opposed the Regime's interference with education and youth organizations. Some Protestants formed the 'confessional church' led by Martin Niemöller.
- Many Germans were shocked by the brutality of the Nazis to the Jews during the Crystal Night attacks 9/10 November 1938.
- Some aristocratic Generals feared the threat posed to the army by one S.S. and opposed Hitler's aggressive foreign policy after 1937 which threatened war before Germany was fully prepared.
- Von Blomberg and von Fritsch opposed Hitler's policy in 1937 and Generals Beck and Halder plotted to oust Hitler in September 1938 during the Czech crisis.

Who opposed?

There were three main groups of people who tried to oppose the Nazis.

- Political parties like the Communists and the Socialists. They were banned from 1933, but worked underground in secret, keeping their organisation together and publishing newsletters. There was a big communist group called the Red Orchestra, which became very important during the Second World War.
- Young People. There were a number of student groups who distributed leaflets and organised meetings. One group, at Munich University, called the 'White Rose', centred around Hans and Sophie Scholl. They were arrested and executed in 1944.
- Some young people simply rejected the Nazis. 'Swing' groups listened to American jazz and openly admired American fashions.
- 'Edelweiss Pirates' were working class Groups who mocked the self-righteous Nazis and refused to join the Hitler Youth.
- Religious groups. These were the most difficult to deal with as many Germans would not have accepted attacks on the Catholic and Protestant Churches.
- Some Christians spoke out against the Nazis, like Martin Niemoller and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
- Later, in the war years, some people in the army became horrified by the Nazis' brutality and worried that Hitler was leading Germany to certain defeat.
- In 1944 some officers planted a bomb in his war-room, but it failed to kill him. 5,000 people were executed in retaliation.

Why did opposition to the Nazis fail?

- Terror was a very important factor. Everybody knew that they were being watched. In every block of flats there was someone recording when people went in and out and who they met. People could be arrested at any moment and never be seen again.
- The Nazis established a powerful terror system by controlling the police and expanding the power of the SS.
- Children spied on their parents. Hitler tried to break down the family and make children loyal to him. He was described as their father in schoolbooks.
- Endless and powerful propaganda had its effect. It was impossible to get anti-Nazi views heard at all and the mass of people only heard good things.
- There was no mass feeling of resentment against Hitler, at least until the middle of the war.

- The speed and ruthlessness of Hitler's seizure and consolidation of dictatorship surprised and confused his opponents. Legal opposition became almost impossible following the Emergency Decree of 28 February 1933.
- Key leaders of the political opposition such as Ernst Thalmann and Otto Wels were arrested and sent to concentration camps in March 1933.
- The communists and socialists were bitterly divided and failed to present a united front.
- The communists were ordered by Stalin not to oppose the dictatorship but rather to await its inevitable collapse during economic crisis.
- Democratic opponents were too committed to legal methods. They were slow to appreciate that only the removal of Hitler could destroy the dictatorship.
- The conservative opponents were compromised by their alliances with the Nazis and sympathy for some of Hitler's policies.
- Resistance groups were isolated and uncoordinated.
- Church leaders were generally concerned only with defending their own interests within the system.
- Army leaders were trapped by their oath of allegiance to Hitler 2nd August 1934. Many were sympathetic to his policies of rearmament and military expansion.
- Resistance groups failed to motivate popular support.
- Most Germans were indifferent or non-political. They were impressed by the promises and apparent changes that Hitler brought about.
- Many people were enjoying improved standards of living and supported Hitler's policy of destroying the Treaty of Versailles and restoration of national pride.
- Violence developed gradually during the years 1933-39. In 1936 there was a relaxation during the Olympic Games.
- Violent excesses were attributed to Nazi subordinates, not to Hitler personally.

Education and youth

- All schools came under Nazi control. All school books were rewritten and included Nazi ideas about hatred of the Jews and war. Boys and girls went to separate schools.
- All teachers had to join the Nazi Teachers League

- The curriculum was changed. Subjects concentrated upon German history and nationalism. Girls were prevented from studying science and could only learn the mathematics necessary to be a housewife.
- In History pupils were taught about great events of German history, from a pro-German point of view. The Nazis view of the First World War, the 'stab in the back' was included as 'the truth'.
- In Biology pupils were taught the phoney 'race science', which was designed to 'prove' the superiority of the German race.
- In PE: pupils got much more PE; boxing was compulsory for boys; girls were taught to cook and care for the home.

What happened in the Nazi Youth Movements?

- Children joined at the age of five and stayed until eighteen. Membership was virtually compulsory. Boys joined the Pimpfen, then the German Youth and then the Hitler Youth. Girls joined the League of German Maidens.
- Children took part in 'fun' activities, camping, sports and outings. These helped make the Youth movements popular at first.
- They also had lectures about Nazi ideas, like racism. The girls were taught about child-rearing. The boys did activities which prepared them for the army: cleaning rifles, reading maps, throwing hand grenades, doing mock parachute jumps, going on long marches.
- The meetings were in the evenings and at weekends. Girls found that they had little time for homework. This was to prevent them having a career. Children were encouraged to spy on their parents and report what they did and said.
- In 1933 30% of young people in Germany were in the Nazi Youth movements; by 1938 it was 82%. In 1939 it became compulsory.
- By the later 1930s some young people were getting resentful of the time it took up, the boring lectures they had all heard before at school, the incomprehensible readings from Mein Kampf.

Religion in Nazi Germany

Hitler was hostile to Christianity, but many Germans were churchgoers and he did not attack the churches at once. He even claimed to be a Catholic to win support from the papacy.

- 1933 Concordat with the Pope to protect the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. Nevertheless, Catholic groups were shut down and bishops imprisoned.

- Some Protestants formed a 'Reich Church', as part of the Nazi Party. Mein Kampf was placed next to the bible on the altar and the swastika was given equal prominence with the cross. Many Protestants refused to join and many were arrested.
- Many other religious groups persecuted.

Racism, citizenship and treatment of minorities

Hitler blamed Jews for the defeat of Germany in the First World War. He wanted to purify German blood by eliminating all Jews and other minority groups.

In fact only about 1% of the population of Germany were Jewish. They were well-integrated, filling many positions in society, and contributing to it.

- From 1933 Jews were subjected to increasing persecution in Nazi Germany.
- At first they were banned from some professions, doctors, dentists, the civil service, for example.
- Nazis also called for Jewish shops to be boycotted.
- Then in 1935 the Nuremberg Laws were announced; these made Jews second class citizens and prevented them from marrying non-Jews.
- All kinds of civil rights were removed: voting, going to university, travelling, attending a theatre, cinema or sporting event.
- In 1938 a young Jew assassinated a German diplomat in France. This led to an organised attack on Jewish shops, houses and synagogues all over Germany. 91 Jews killed; 20,000 arrested. The Jewish community in Germany had to pay a "fine" of 1 billion marks. This was known as Kristallnacht (the night of broken glass).
- From early 1939 Jews were banned from owning businesses; all men to add the name 'Israel' and all women the name 'Sara' to their own.
- The aim of the Nazis was to force Jews to leave Germany and many did, going to Britain, France and the USA in particular. But once war broke out this became more difficult, so Jews were forced into Concentration Camps.

The structure of the Nazi state and the personal role of Hitler

How was the state Nazified 1933-1934?

- The key method was one of 'co-ordination' or 'Gleichschaltung' of state institutions and organisations.

- Gradually all parts of the government, administration and legal and judicial processes were brought under the control of the Nazi Party.
- The Civil Service, the Courts, the Police and Education were purged of all Jews and political opponents.
- The Free Trade Unions were abolished on 2nd May 1933 and replaced by the Nazi DAF (Deutsche Arbeit Front) led by Robert Ley.
- The Centre and Conservative Parties (DVP, DNVP) willingly dissolved: the Social Democrats were outlawed in July 1933.
- The Reichsrat (Upper House) and state parliaments were dissolved in January 1934. Nazi Governors (Reichstatthalter) were appointed to rule the states.

How was the Nazi state organized?

The Nazi state was not a monolithic structure: power was divided between several different overlapping and often competing systems.

The State Civil Service

- This was professional and efficient and was initially protected from party interference by Interior Minister, Frick.
- Jews and political dissidents were purged in March 1933.
- Hess controlled all appointments from 1935: party membership became compulsory in 1939. Increasingly the civil service became subordinate to the Nazi machine.
- Its role increasingly became the implementation and enforcement of Nazi decrees.
- The civil service became progressively less efficient as it became more dominated by the Nazi Party. Bureaucracy increased because the Nazis were addicted to paper work.

The Nazi Party

- This was initially too radical, unwieldy, divided and inexperienced to compete with the civil service. The calibre declined as the membership rapidly increased in the first half of 1933.
- Rival bodies were established to shadow, marginalise, by-pass or take over from state agencies.
- The party secretary, Rudolf Hess established a more efficient, informed and disciplined Department to influence policy making by 1937.

- The party controlled 32 Nazi regional bosses 'Gauleiters' and all the local District Group Cells and Block leaders. It had 5 million members and 500,000 officials.
- The party developed 'affiliated' or 'front' groups for workers, farmers and professional people.

The SS (Schutzstaffel)

- Initially, Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS, led by Heinrich Himmler grew into one of the most powerful blocs in the dictatorship. The organization was administered by Oswald Pohl.
- It represented Nazi ideological and racial purity and was the main instrument in the Terror State.
- Concentration camp guards led by Theodor Eicke formed a separate SS unit known from 1936 as SS Totenkopfverbände (SS Death's Head Units)
- A Waffen SS (armed SS) was formed in March 1939 combining the SS-VT with the camp guards.

How strong a dictator was Hitler?

- He was prepared to delegate large or ill-defined powers to his trusted henchmen.
- He did however maintain a dominant influence over appointments, promotions, dismissals and policy-making, sometimes interfering at the last minute.
- Hitler's power as Chancellor in January 1933 was still limited by the democratic checks of the Weimar constitution. 8 out of a Cabinet of 11 were non-Nazis and Hitler did not have a majority in the Reichstag.
- Hitler's dictatorship was established by the Enabling Act of March 1933, which gave him the right to govern without reference to the Reichstag for four years, and by the creation of a one-party state in June 1933.
- Following the death of Hindenburg (2 August 1934) Hitler absorbed powers of Chancellor and President as 'Führer' of Germany. He was able to count upon the allegiance of the Army.
- The adoption of the title 'Führer' was designed to emphasise a new relationship between Hitler and the German people.
- He attempted to develop a 'cult of personality' in which he became all-powerful and all-knowing. Children were encouraged to think of him as their father.
- The purge of army dissidents von Blomberg and von Fritsch (Feb.1938) consolidated his control of the army.

- Hitler became Commander in Chief of all the armed forces with a personal command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht) headed by the loyalist Keitel.

How efficient a dictator was Hitler?

- Hitler ruled by the 'Führerprinzip' that enshrined his will as law and the source of all executive authority. He was the embodiment of the state and the representative of the will of the German people. This allowed Hitler to rule by decree without reference to any other body or organisation.
- The concept of an all powerful and omniscient Führer was built up by the Nazi Party under Goebbels direction. This meant that Germans who were not members of the Party were forced to accept decisions against their own better judgement.
- This could be a major weakness as no one could refuse to obey an order from the Führer, even when he was obviously wrong. During the war it became a serious weakness.
- In public his subordinates appeared to remain totally committed to his ideology and worked assiduously to implement the will of the Führer.
- In private there was much competition between his leading lieutenants as each tried to expand their influence and control in the Party and Germany.
- But despite all appearances of efficiency and organisation, Hitler was lazy and chaotic in style, bored by meetings and committees and was away from Berlin for long periods of time.
- Hitler had limited knowledge of many areas of policies and was not prepared to carry out detailed research.
- Hitler could be unpredictable, at times delegating to subordinates on other occasions interfering, sometimes at the last moment.
- Hitler had five 'separate secretaries', all of whom attempted to organise his diary and programme. These were used by different leading Nazis to try to expand their personal empires with the Party and the state.

How was Nazi domestic policy radicalised 1933 – 1939?

- Hitler's dictatorship was consolidated 1933 – 1934 so policies had to be cautious and disguised by a legal façade in order to maintain alliances with conservative interests in politics, business and army.
- By 1935 the Nazis were able to pursue more radical ideas based upon their ideological priorities:
- The civil service and all professional bodies were Nazified by 1936.

- Leading military dissidents von Blomberg, the Defence Minister and von Fritsch, the Commander in Chief were purged in February 1938. 44 other Generals were retired or transferred and younger more Nazi inclined officers were promoted.
- Hitler became Commander in Chief of all the Armed Forces. The ultra-loyalist Keitel became head of the personal command of Wehrmacht and von Brauchitsch became its Commander in Chief.
- The conservative von Neurath was replaced by the Nazi von Ribbentrop as Foreign Minister in 1938.
- The conservative Schacht, who had masterminded the German economic recovery from 1933 to 1936, was sidelined and resigned (November 1937).
- He was replaced as Minister for Economics and Plenipotentiary-General for Economy by the more pliable Funk.
- The Nazis established greater control over economic planning with the establishment of the 4 year plan led by Hermann Goering.
- The Nazis began to challenge non-Nazi youth organisations. Membership of the Hitler Youth became compulsory in 1936. Attendance at meetings was more than 80% of German youth in 1939.
- The Nuremberg Laws (November 1935) deprived Jews from the rights of citizenship and banned marriage or any sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews.
- Jews were banned from schools and all places of entertainment.
- During the Kristallnacht ('Crystal Night') on the 9/10 November 1938, Jewish shops and synagogues were destroyed by stormtroopers. 600 Jews were murdered and 5,000 transported to concentration camps.
- Jews were excluded from any participation in commercial life after 1938.

Why did Nazi domestic policy become more radical 1935 – 1939?

This question has generated much discussion between Historians.

'Intentionalists' argue that:

- Hitler's moderation 1933 – 1935 was merely a device to win conservative support by disguising his real ambitions.
- Having consolidated his dictatorship, Hitler attempted to implement his 'World View' ('Weltanschauung') as outlined in 'Mein Kampf'. He was fulfilling a clearly defined 'programme'.

- Policies were designed to prepare for European domination and to rid a Nazi controlled continent of all Jews.
- Policies should be seen as the product of the all-dominant will of the Fuhrer, unlimited by any pressure or the course of events.
- Hitler deliberately allowed different organisations to develop within the Party machine in order to create a dynamic entity.
- Hitler encouraged rivalry between his lieutenants in order to achieve greater efficiency and closer adherence to his will.
- For example, there was rivalry between Goering and Himmler for control of the security forces.
- On the other hand, Goering was allowed to establish control over the economy

In opposition, '**Structuralists**' or '**Functionalists**' argue that:

- Hitler had no clear blueprint to follow.
- Nazi ideas were muddled, confused and contradictory. Different sections of the Party and state competed with each other. In some cases there was even competition within departments. For example Heydrich urged a more aggressive approach to security than Himmler and was eventually seen as a rival to his own leader.
- Policies emerged ad hoc in response to events. The purge of the Stormtroopers on 2 June 1934 was a response to pressure from business and the army, NOT a pre-determined policy.
- The Four Year Plan was the response to Hitler's conflict with Schacht and Big Business, not part of Nazi policy for the economy.
- Major policies or events were sometimes NOT the work of Hitler or the Party, but were inspired or formulated by henchmen or by subordinate agencies.
- The extent to which Hitler was personally involved in the Reichstag Fire is not clear.
- The Nuremberg Laws (1935) and Reichskristallnacht (1938) were both prompted by pressure from party radicals led by Goebbels, although Goering subsequently tried to take credit for both.
- Hitler appears not to have been interested in rivalry between his leading lieutenants. Consequently all tried to expand their personal empires.
- Goering's tried to increase his personal fortune, by taking control of political, social and economic aspects of the Nazi regime and state security.

- Resulting diversification weakened the German economy and subsequently the war effort.

Key people

Adolf Hitler (1889-1945): Leader of the Nazi Party from its early origins until its demise at the end of the Second World War. Hitler was born in Austria, but moved to Germany during the First World War and served in the German army. Hitler built up the Nazi Party, attracting and holding together an eclectic mix of anti-Semites, nationalists, militarists and assorted thugs. Hitler was appointed as Germany's chancellor in January 1933 and became absolute dictator by mid-1934. Among his key party associates were Josef Goebbels (1897-1945), who served as the minister of propaganda, Hermann Goering (1893-1946), who served (at different times) as Prussian minister of justice, the president of the Reichstag and air marshal, Heinrich Himmler (1900-45), who became head of the SS or Protection Squad and Rudolf Hess (1894-1987), the deputy head of the party.

Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg (1847-1934): A landowner from a noble family, Hindenburg became a war hero during the First World War. Elected president in 1925, he won re-election, defeating Hitler, in 1932. Hindenburg was under the influence of a number of conservative politicians, including Franz von Papen (1879-1969), who served as chancellor in 1932 and vice-chancellor in 1933-34 and General Kurt von Schleicher (1882-1934), who was chancellor for two months in 1932-33.

Heinrich Brüning (1885-1970): Chancellor from 1930 to 1932, Brüning designed some of the economic relief programmes for which Hitler later took credit. A moderate, Brüning was forced to resign after he attempted to ban the SA, also known as the Storm Division or Storm Troopers.

Gregor Strasser (1892-1934): A leading organiser within the Nazi Party, Strasser helped to oversee its expansion during the early 1930s. Briefly courted by conservative politicians who saw him as a more reasonable leader than Hitler, Strasser was murdered on the Night of the Long Knives with others who were perceived as threats to Hitler.

Ernst Röhm (1887-1934): Head of the SA, Röhm represented the radical arm of the Nazi movement, which was bent on dramatically reshaping German society. Although he never considered overthrowing Hitler, his refusal to rein in the SA in 1933 after the Nazis' assumption of power led to his assassination on the Night of the Long Knives.

Friedrich Ebert (1871-1925): A socialist leader and one of the architects of the Weimar Republic, Ebert served as the Republic's first president from 1919 to 1925.

Alfred Hugenberg (1865-1961): Hugenberg was an influential conservative politician and leader of the German National People's Party. His agreement to participate in Hitler's first cabinet played a key role in winning conservative support for Hitler's appointment.

SA (Sturmabteilungen; 'Storm Division' or 'Storm Troopers'): Also known as stormtroopers, the SA was a paramilitary group affiliated with the Nazi Party. Its membership, composed largely of thugs and bullies, engaged in frequent street fights with socialists and communists during the Weimar period. The disorder the SA created was an asset to the Nazis before 1933, but then became a problem; the organisation, whose membership peaked at four million, lost influence after Röhm's assassination.

SS (Schutzstaffel; 'Protection Squad'): Originally an offshoot of the SA, the SS was created to provide security for party leaders. It evolved into an elite military and police force after 1933.

Gestapo: The Gestapo was the German political police, whose existence pre-dated the Nazi seizure of power. After 1933, the Gestapo was used by the Nazis to persecute political opponents and was slowly merged with the SS.

Hitler Youth: An organisation created to indoctrinate teenage boys in the virtues of Nazism and to teach them military skills. Its counterpart for girls was the League of German Girls; women could participate in the National Socialist Women's Organization.

German Labour Front (DAF): A Nazi-controlled labour union created in 1933. The organisation tried to coerce workers into fulfilling Nazi agendas, though it also provided them with inexpensive holiday and recreational programmes through its 'Strength Through Joy' wing.

Reichsbanner: A socialist paramilitary organisation, the Reichsbanner frequently clashed with the SA before 1933. Many expected the Reichsbanner to resist a Nazi seizure of power, but it failed to react to Hitler's seemingly legitimate appointment as chancellor.

Freikorps ('Free Corps'): This term is used to describe a variety of nationalist paramilitary units that roamed Germany in the years after the First World War; Freikorps units were responsible for the overthrow of several socialist mini-states set up in Germany at this time. Many members of Freikorps units went on to join the SA or the Nazi Party.

Weimar Political Parties: On the left were the German Socialist Party (SPD) and the German Communist Party (KPD). The SPD was the largest party in Germany throughout the 1920s and participated in several coalition cabinets; the KPD, which splintered off from the more moderate SPD in 1919, called for immediate revolution. Moderate parties included the liberal German Democratic Party (whose support faded throughout the 1920s) and the Catholic Centre Party, which participated in many of the ruling coalitions during the Weimar period. On the right were the German People's Party and the more conservative German National People's Party. The German Workers' Party (DAP), which would later become the Nazi, or National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), was originally viewed as a radical splinter group with a racist agenda.

Harzburg Front: A short-lived attempt by traditional conservative parties to create an anti-democratic coalition with the Nazis in 1931. The first serious attempt by conservatives to manipulate the Nazis, the Front fell apart when Hitler pulled out.

Munich: The capital of Bavaria and founding-place of the Nazi Party, as well as the site of the failed Beer Hall Putsch, an attempted coup in 1923 led by Hitler, who was eventually sentenced to five years' imprisonment.

Nuremberg: A city in northern Bavaria that served as the site of an annual Nazi mass rally. The 1934 rally was the basis for Leni Riefenstahl's documentary *Triumph of the Will*. After the Second World War, it became the site of a tribunal trying Nazi war criminals.

Ruhr: A western German region and mining centre. The Ruhr was occupied by France in 1923-24 as punishment for Germany's failure to meet its reparations payment schedule. The occupation became a rallying point for Germans and helped trigger the Beer Hall Putsch.

Rhineland: Another western German state, the Rhineland was made a demilitarised zone by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler's re-militarisation of the Rhineland in 1936 was a direct challenge to England and France.

Saar: The Treaty of Versailles stipulated that this western German province be administered by France for fifteen years, at which point a plebiscite would be held to determine its future. The majority of German inhabitants voted overwhelmingly to rejoin Germany in 1935.

Sudetenland: Part of Czechoslovakia, the Sudetenland had a large ethnic German population, making it one of several foreign territories that Hitler wanted to annex. The decision by England and France to force Czechoslovakia to cede this area to Germany in 1938 marked a major foreign policy victory for Hitler before the Second World War.

Timeline

1918

The armistice ending the First World War is signed in November. Kaiser Wilhelm II flees Germany amid military mutinies and disorder. On November 9, a SPD-led coalition government declares Germany a republic.

1919

Members of the newly founded KPD launch a failed uprising in January. National elections are held for an assembly, which forms a new government and drafts the Weimar Constitution. A short-lived socialist republic is established in Bavaria during April and May. In June, the Allied coalition forces the newly elected German government to sign the onerous Treaty of Versailles.

Adolf Hitler joins the newly established German Workers' Party (DAP) in September.

1920

A failed right-wing coup attempt (the Kapp Putsch) occurs amid continued fighting between the Freikorps and socialist militias.

Hitler writes the DAP 25 Point Programme—a statement that makes clear the party's nationalistic agenda; in February, the party, still a local Bavarian organisation, changes its name to National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazis).

1921

Hitler becomes the undisputed leader of the Nazi Party.

1922

Italian Fascists, led by Benito Mussolini, march on Rome; Mussolini is appointed Italian prime minister.

1923

France invades the Ruhr province to compel Germany's payment of reparations. Hyperinflation, which began in 1922, grows worse—the old currency becomes worthless and is finally replaced by a new currency in November. The Weimar Republic then enters a period of relative economic and social stability.

In November, Hitler launches a failed coup in Munich (the Beer Hall Putsch), which is easily put down by the military. The Nazi Party is outlawed, and Hitler and a number of party leaders are arrested.

1924

In February, Hitler is placed on trial for 'attempt[ing] to alter by force the German Constitution'; the trial provides him with a national platform to promote his views and makes him a nationwide public figure. Hitler is found guilty and sentenced to five years' imprisonment, only to be released after eight months. While in prison, he writes *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), 'a blueprint for the Third Reich,' in which he lays out his somewhat incoherent ideological beliefs (Shirer 81).

1925

President Friedrich Ebert dies, and Hindenburg is elected to the post. France pulls out of the Ruhr.

Hitler re-establishes the Nazi Party, which is now a national organisation with centralised leadership.

1926

Hitler appoints Josef Goebbels as Gauleiter of Berlin; his success in this post will lead to his elevation to the party's head of propaganda in 1928.

1928

The Nazis participate in Reichstag elections, drawing only 2.6 per cent of the national vote.

1929

The crash of the New York Stock Market signals the start of the worldwide Great Depression; German unemployment, already at high levels (three million people out of work), starts to climb as the international crisis affects the German economy.

1930

The final Weimar coalition government collapses over disagreements about how to respond to the Great Depression. A period of presidential cabinets and rule by decree begins.

The Nazis receive 18.3 per cent of the vote in Reichstag elections.

1932

Papen replaces Brüning as chancellor; Papen then dissolves the SPD-led Prussian coalition government. Hindenburg defeats Hitler in a close presidential race. Clashes between the SA, Reichsbanner and communists increase as unemployment reaches almost six million. Schleicher engineers Papen's fall and his own appointment as chancellor in December.

The Nazis poll 37.4 per cent in July Reichstag elections and 33.1 per cent in November elections.

1933

Hitler is appointed chancellor by President Hindenburg on January 30. The Nazis take control of regional governments and suspend civil liberties after the Reichstag is burned in a mysterious fire on February 27. The Nazis use this as a pretext for unleashing a wave of terror against communists, socialists and other critics, many of whom are arrested and sent to newly established concentration camps. The Nazis win forty-three per cent of the vote in March elections. The KDP is outlawed and its Reichstag delegation arrested, making possible the passage of the Enabling Act, which empowers the cabinet to rule by decree for four years. A rush to join the Nazi Party begins; 1.5 million new members will join before admission is frozen in 1935.

After the March elections, the erosion of the rule of law that limits state powers accelerates. The Nazis take control of the political and criminal police. All other political parties are forced to dissolve between March and July, making it possible for the Nazis to

win ninety-two per cent of the vote in a November plebiscite. The 'co-ordination' of German society begins when independent social and political organisations are forced to disband or merge with the Nazi Party. A boycott is called against Jewish businesses in April, and most Jewish civil servants are forced to resign. Pro-Nazi student groups organise large-scale book burnings in May. Possible sources of foreign interference are eliminated, first through the signing of the Concordat with the Catholic Church, then through Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations in November.

1934

After rumours of a possible SA revolt upset military leaders, Hitler orders the execution (or assassination) of Röhm, Strasser, Schleicher and other potential opponents in the Blood Purge (also known as the Night of the Long Knives). The arrests and shootings begin on June 29 and continue until July 2. In August, Hindenburg dies and Hitler assumes the office of president (in contravention of the Enabling Act), solidifying his dictatorship over Germany.

1935

In January, residents of the Saar vote overwhelmingly to be reunited with Germany. Hitler then officially renounces the Treaty of Versailles, announcing the creation of a German air force and the dramatic expansion of the German army. England and France fail to respond to these provocations. In the fall, the Nuremberg laws are implemented, stripping German Jews of their citizenship and making marriage between Jews and 'Aryans' illegal.

1936

The Nazis' Four Year Plan for the German economy is announced, marking the start of large-scale rearmament. In March, Hitler re-militarises the Rhineland, again violating the Treaty of Versailles. The Summer Olympics are held in Berlin.

1938

The Anschluss (annexation) with Austria occurs in March. Hitler demands that the Sudetenland be turned over to German control; France and England capitulate to his demands after negotiations in Munich. In November, a co-ordinated attack on German Jews and their property throughout Germany occurs (Kristallnacht, or the Night of the Broken Glass); 91 Jews are killed, hundreds of synagogues are torched, and between 20,000 and 30,000 Jewish men are arrested.

1939

Germany annexes the remaining Czech part of Czechoslovakia in March; again England and France do not respond. Germany demands that Poland cede sections of East Prussia awarded to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles. When Poland refuses, Germany negotiates a secret treaty with the Soviet Union (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) in August. On September 1, 1939, Germany invades Poland, setting off the Second World War.

