

Republic to Reich



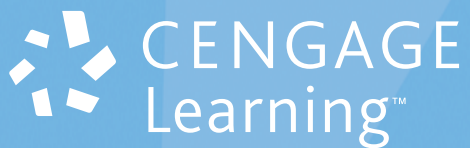
A History of Germany 1918–1945



KJ Mason

4th edition





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KJ Mason

Contributor: Nicole Mansfield

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PREFACE

The first edition of *Republic to Reich* appeared in 1998. This is a completely revised fourth edition. Much has changed in the 20 years since the book first appeared.

No one can really dispute historian Adam Tooze's recent observation that our understanding of Nazi Germany 'has been transformed over the last twenty years'. This transformation is a consequence of both the volume of new material that has come to light and the work of a new generation of gifted historians who continue to offer new insights and challenging interpretations based on the evidence. We now know more about this turbulent era than at any time before, and perhaps now, at last, we are beginning to understand it.

Between 1918 and 1945 momentous forces were at work in modern Germany. Within one generation, the German people endured defeat in war, an experiment with democracy, which in turn collapsed to be replaced by a brutal dictatorship, and a second devastating war that left the nation divided and utterly defeated. Although these events happened in the first half of the twentieth century, their impact has continued to influence the course of history. These events offer not only a sombre story but also important messages for new generations. The fact that this text is now in its fourth edition is a reminder that the subject matter is forever relevant.

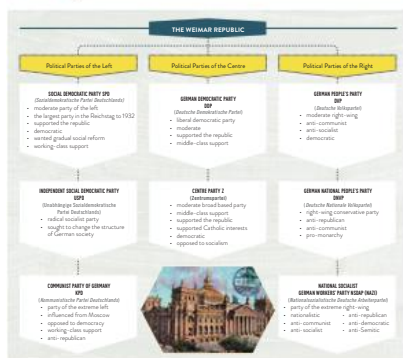
When asked why they like history, students will almost always answer 'because it's interesting.' As teachers, we take what is past and reanimate it, and through our own enthusiasm and understanding we enthuse others. In the case of German history from 1918 to 1939 and then the European war that Germany called into being, the task of triggering that level of interest is made easier by the extraordinary events and personalities of the time. I hope this new fourth edition of *Republic to Reich* will be of some assistance to teachers as they face this important task, and that students will enjoy and benefit from their study of this remarkable period of world history.

James Mason, OAM

The REFERENCE SECTION at the start of the book contains a glossary and a brief description of key individuals and groups as easy reference for readers.

ABOUT THIS BOOK **v**

DIAGRAMS are used throughout the book to summarise complex topics



MAPS help you to visualise changing national boundaries and battlegrounds



BIOGRAPHY BOXES introduce key figures.

GUSTAV STRESEMANN

Gustav Stresemann was one of the new outstanding political figures of the Weimar Republic. Born into a middle-class Berlin family in 1878, Stresemann had been a businessman before he entered politics in 1907 and in 1917 he was elected leader of the National Liberal Party (DVP). Stresemann had a deeply felt sense of nationalism and he supported the war effort and the policies of Ludendorff, including the use of unrestricted submarine warfare and the severe treaty of Brest-Litovsk which Germany imposed on defeated Russia in 1918. Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929), German chancellor from August to November 1923 and foreign minister from 1923 to 1929. He was a man of great self-confidence, courage and personal

Stresemann had supported the monarchy but after the republic was proclaimed he accepted the reality of the new political situation and became one of its true champions. In 1919 when the National Liberal Party split into the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the German National People's Party (DNVP), Stresemann formed his own political party, the German People's Party (DVP), a conservative political group. He was a nationalist and a demagogue who distributed both the radical left and the radical right with their push attempts and their resort to political violence. From 13 August to 23 November 1923, Stresemann was chancellor of a coalition government. In his short-lived time as chancellor he addressed the issue of the inflation crippling the nation.

IMAGES and **EXTRACTS** are used throughout the text and can be incorporated into additional classroom and homework activities. Many of the images and extracts featured in *Republic to Reich* have not been used in other student texts.



The Stresemann government came to office at a critical time in the history of the Weimar Republic. Stresemann's first major step was to call off the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr. The French were in their eighth month of occupation in the Ruhr, the German economy was in chaos and the currency worthless, and separatist movements in the German states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia threatened the unity of the republic.

Life became horrific. 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.

Stresemann's first major 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. Stresemann's first major step was to call off the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr, but for Stresemann the reality of the situation was that Germany could not begin to remedy the disastrous economic situation until the Ruhr problem was sorted, and to sort it

ACTIVITIES AND LEARNING TASKS

Regular in-chapter activity blocks build students' understanding of content.

3.1 QUESTIONS

- Explain the meaning of terms 'left-wing' and 'right-wing' in the political context.
- Draw a line and on it mark these three positions on the line – extreme left, center and extreme right. Place the following political German parties at the point in the line that you feel best reflects their political position in Weimar Germany: SPD, KPD, DNVP, NSDAP, Zentrum, DVP, DDP.
- 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 weaknesses of the constitution. Select one of these items and explain why you believe this to be a strength or weakness of the constitution.
- How the system of government worked. Consider the following statements and add what you believe to be the missing words or phrases:
 - The German Head of State was the ... elected by the Germans people every ... years.
 - The head of the government was the ... who controlled a majority of seats in the ...
 - The head of the government was appointed by the ...
 - Laws were passed in the ... and were signed into law by the ...
 - The name for the ministers who made up a government was the ...
- Outline the special powers given to the President of Germany in Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution.

End-of-chapter activity blocks support content consolidation and include exam-styled questions.

HSC STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- Explain how the German army maintained its position and influence during the period of the Weimar Republic.
- How successful was the Weimar Republic in dealing with some of the major problems which confronted it the period 1919–1923?
- To what extent could it be argued that the challenges faced by the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1923 came from both within and from without?

End-of-part activity blocks consolidate whole-topic learning.

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC 1919–1929

- Using a diagram similar to the one below consider the following events of the Weimar era 1919–1929. Place the event in its correct position on the horizontal time line and on the vertical line position the event as either a HIGH point in the history of Weimar Germany or a LOW point in the history of Weimar Germany. Explain any pattern you see emerging from the placements.

Event	Point
Reichstag elections 1928	Assassination Walter Rathenau
The Dawes Plan	The Spartacist Revolt
The Kapp Putsch	German Hyperinflation
French occupation of the Ruhr	Germany joins the League of Nations
Introduction of the Rentenmark	Paul von Hindenburg elected president
The Locarno Treaty	The Young Plan

LOOKING BACK

1. Prepare a list of arguments both FOR and AGAINST the following statement: 'That 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.'

2. Identify two statements in this list which cannot be supported by the historical evidence?

- The political stability of the period 1924 to 1928 was based on the SPD, DDP, DVP and the Centre Party all part of coalition governments.
- The German economy prospered after 1923 was heavily dependent on foreign loans.
- The Weimar Republic saw a significant advance in the concept of the welfare state.
- The Weimar years were ones of great creative cultural expression which was embraced by all Germans.

3. Account for the relative success and stability of the Weimar Republic from 1924 to the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.

4. 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.

5. What were the major political and social problems faced by the Weimar Republic?

6. '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?

7. 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.

8. Account for the relative success and stability of the Weimar Republic from 1924 to the onset of the Great Depression in 1929.

WEBLINKS

Weblinks for *Republic to Reich* can be found at <http://nmh-reich.nelsonnet.com.au> or accessed directly from NelsonNet books.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to a number of people who assisted with the production of this fourth edition of *Republic to Reich*. I owe a particular debt to my editor, Michael Spurr, for his unfailing courtesy and generosity of spirit. It was reassuring to work with a man who has a considerable resource in German history, and his suggestions and guidance were as insightful as they were appreciated.

I wish to acknowledge the support of others in the Cengage team: Julie McArthur, Karen Young and Georgia O'Connor. Thanks also to Shore School, NSW.

Finally, I am very appreciative to my family who, as always, offered unfailing support and more than a share of patience in what was a very busy year.

To Anne

KEY FIGURES

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 to 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, Goebbels 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 World War I hero, Göring 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)



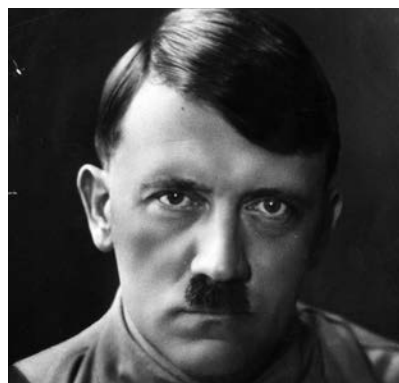
A member of the Nazi Party from the early 1920s, Himmler rose to become *Reichsführer SS* (Reich Leader of the SS) and Chief of German Police, a position that included supreme command over the Gestapo, the concentration camps and the *Waffen SS*.

Paul von Hindenburg (1847–1934)



One of Germany's military leaders during World War I, Hindenburg 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.

Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)



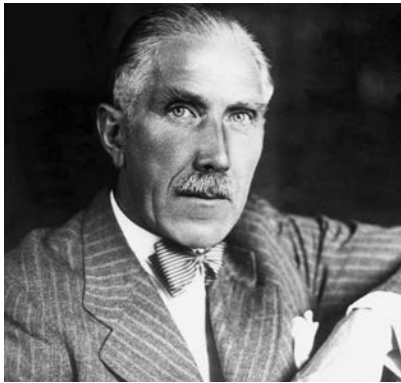
Leader of the Nazi Party. After a long struggle for power he was appointed chancellor of Germany in January 1933, and by 1934 he had established a totalitarian state. With the death of President von Hindenburg in August 1934, Hitler became the *Führer* (Leader) of the German nation, a position he held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

Clockwise from top: Alamy Stock Photo/Pictorial Press Ltd; Getty Images/Heinrich Hoffmann; imagefolk/Berliner Verlag/Archiv/dpa-Zentralbild; Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo; Alamy Stock Photo/Shawshots

Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919)

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

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.

Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003)

After an early career as an actress, Riefenstahl 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).

Kurt von Schleicher (1882–1934)

An army officer and German politician with a reputation for political intrigue, von Schleicher 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.

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 organisational skills helped 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.

Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929)

The most important of the politicians of the Weimar era, Stresemann 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.

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

Adolf Hitler-Schule

Adolf Hitler Schools. Special schools for selected boys who were seen as future leaders of the Third Reich.

Alte Kämpfer

The 'old fighters' – the name given to members of the Nazi Party since the difficult days of the early 1920s, in particular those who had been involved in the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch.

Anschluss

A German term for the union of Austria and Germany. An *Anschluss*, or union, had been forbidden under the terms of the Paris peace settlements of 1919. Hitler carried out the union of these two nations in March 1938.

anti-Semitism

An attitude or action that is anti-Jewish.

Appeasement

The name given to the policy of the Western democracies to try and 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

Lightning war. Military tactics 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 during the attacks on Poland and on the Western Front in 1939–1940.

Blut und Boden

Blood and soil.

Bund Deutscher Mädel

The female equivalent of the Hitler Youth, for girls aged 14 to 18 years.

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.

Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF)

The German Labour Front. The Trade Union movement established by the Nazi Party for all of Germany. All other trade unions were illegal.

diktat

A term used by the Germans to describe the Treaty of Versailles. It means an imposed or dictated peace.

Dolchstoßlegende

The 'stab-in-the-back' legend. This refers to the view promoted by the leadership of the German army in 1918 that the army had not lost the war, but rather, that the German military had been betrayed at home.

Ein Reich, Ein Volk, Ein Führer

One Nation, One People, One Leader. A slogan used in Germany from 1934 to 1945.

Einsatzgruppen

Special mobile operational forces of the SS who were ordered to murder mainly Jews and communists in occupied Poland and Russia.

expressionist movement

A movement in the arts from the late nineteenth 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.

Freikorps

The Free Corps. Military units formed in 1918 and made up mainly of ex-soldiers. They were opposed to the extremists of the left and were used to crush the Spartacist Uprising in 1919.

Führer

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

Führerprinzip

The leadership principle. Hitler always believed in the idea of the Nazi movement built around an all-powerful leader, to whom there would be no opposition or challenge.

Gau/Gauleiter

For the purposes of efficiency and planning, the Nazi Party divided Germany into administrative units. 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.

Geheime Staatspolizei

The secret state police or Gestapo, established 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.

Glaube und Schönheit

Faith and Beauty. A Nazi sponsored organisation for young German women over the age of 18.

Gleichschaltung

A term that means 'coordination'. It was 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.

Herrenvolk

A term that can mean 'master race'. In Nazi Germany the German people and nation were considered to be superior to others.

Hitler Jugend

The Hitler Youth. An organisation established by the Nazi Party for boys aged between 14 and 18. Its aim was to provide physical training and to promote discipline and obedience, as well as Nazi ideology in the young.

hyperinflation

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

Jungmädelbund

The League of Young Girls; the Nazi youth movement for girls aged 10 to 14 years.

Junkers

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

Kampfbund

The 'Fighting League'. An organisation of right-wing military groups in Bavaria set up in 1923. Members of the Kampfbund took part in the unsuccessful Munich Beer Hall Putsch in 1923.

Kraft durch Freude

Strength Through Joy. An organisation set up to provide for the leisure time of the German workers.

Kristallnacht

Crystal Night. The name given to the organised Nazi attack on Jewish property across Germany on 9–10 November 1938.

Lebensborn

Spring of Life. A program approved by Himmler to provide for women who were 'racially pure' to have children outside marriage.

Lebensraum

The concept of living space. It was a major part of Hitler's world view that Germany needed living space in eastern Europe, which would be won 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.

Mutterkreuz

The Mother Cross. This was a decoration awarded to women who had a large number of children.

Reichsarbeitsdienst

The Reich Labour Service. An organisation that required all men aged 18 to 25 to perform six months of manual labour in the service of the Reich. It became compulsory for young women during the war.

Reichstag

The name of the lower house of the German parliament.

Reichswehr

The German army during the time of the Weimar Republic.

Der Rote Frontkämpferbund

The Red Front Fighters' League. The left-wing paramilitary organisation supporting the German Communist Party during the Weimar Republic. The right-wing equivalent was the Nazi Party's paramilitary organisation, the SA.

Schutzstaffel (SS)

The term means 'guard detachment'. Formed as Hitler's personal bodyguard, the SS grew under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler to become a powerful and elite force in Nazi Germany.

Sonderkommandos

Prisoners in the death camps who were forced to assist the SS and carried out the tasks associated with the extermination of people.

Sonderweg

A German word that means 'different path'. This is a theory, supported by some historians, that suggests that Germany as a nation followed a different path in its historical development from other European countries such as Britain and France.

Stahlhelm

An ex-servicemen's association made up of former Freikorps members. The Stahlhelm was a right-wing force that supported the German National People's Party.

Sturmabteilung (SA)

The military wing of the Nazi Party, made up in large measure of ex-Freikorps members. They were also known as the Brown Shirts 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 were brought under control and subordinated to the more sinister Schutzstaffel, or SS.

Totenkopfverbände

The Death's Head Units. Part of the SS, their main task was to administer and control the concentration camp system across the Reich.

Untermenschen

A term used in the context of Nazi Germany in relation to race, and which can translate as 'subhuman'.

Volk

A German word that means folk, or people. In German it has a stronger meaning and is used to describe the unifying characteristics of the German people.

Völkischer Beobachter

The newspaper of the Nazi Party. It translates as the 'National Observer'.

Volksgemeinschaft

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

The people's militia, a force made up of old men and young boys and used for home defence in the closing months of the war in Germany.

Waffen SS

The military formations of the SS.

Wehrmacht

The German armed forces. The three branches of the *Wehrmacht* were the Army, the Navy (*Kriegsmarine*) and the Air Force (*Luftwaffe*).

Weltanschauung

A philosophy or view of the world by either a group or an individual.

Weltpolitik

World politics. A term often used to describe the quest for German power and influence by the Germany of Kaiser Wilhelm II.

MAJOR GERMAN POLITICAL PARTIES

Deutsche Demokratische Partei (DDP)

German Democratic Party

Deutsche Nationale Volkspartei (DNVP)

The German National People's Party

Deutsche Volkspartei (DVP)

The German People's Party

Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (KPD)

The Communist Party of Germany

National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei (NSDAP)

The Nazi Party

Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD)

The Social Democratic Party of Germany

Spartakusbund

The Spartacist League

Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD)

The Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany

Zentrum (Z)

The German Centre Party



German postcard depicting crowds gathering in Berlin at the outbreak of the war in 1914.

Germany 1914–1919: War and defeat

CHAPTER 1

GERMANY AND WORLD WAR I

CHAPTER 2

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION

Germany and World War I

1.1

MILITARISM AND NATIONALISM:
GERMANY AND THE COMING OF
WAR 1914

1.2

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES

A German soldier leaves for
war in the early days of the
conflict.



Bridge and Images/Saatchi/Universal Images Group

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KEY WORDS AND TERMS

attrition

In the context of World War I, a war of attrition is the process of fighting to wear down and exhaust the enemy.

chancellor

Another name for the position of prime minister or head of the government.

General Staff

The leadership group within the German army, responsible for planning and directing military operations.

Imperialism

The policy of seeking and acquiring overseas colonies and bringing these areas under the control of the nation-state.

Kaiser

The term for German emperor. *Tsar* is the Russian equivalent.

militarism

Military spirit or military authority.

mobilisation

The process of preparing the military forces for war.

nationalism

The desire to be a nation. Nationalistic feeling is the patriotic emotion of commitment to the nation. Its more aggressive form, extreme nationalism, is the expression of the superiority of one national group over others.

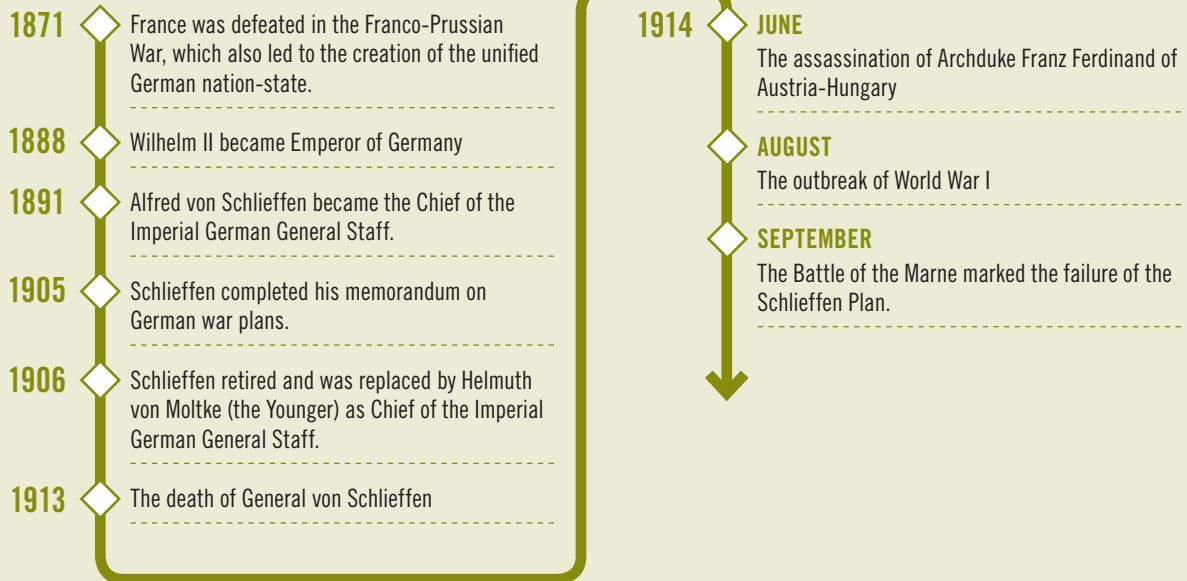
reparations

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

stalemate

A deadlock or standstill. This term is often applied to the nature of the trench warfare in World War I.

Germany to 1919



1.1

MILITARISM AND NATIONALISM: GERMANY AND THE COMING OF WAR 1914

World War I – a century later



Origins of World War I

The question of why World War I broke out in 1914 has occupied historians for more than a century. Given the importance of this conflict in modern history, historians have long debated the question of which nation or group of nations carries the responsibility for this event. In 2014, when the world marked 100 years since the war began, the volume of new material produced on the subject showed that interest has not lessened as new generations of historians re-examine this major turning point in the world's history.

While there is ongoing debate about the causes of the war, there is less debate about its consequences. Now, a century later, it is easy to see how and why this event was so crucial in shaping the pattern of world history. The most obvious consequence was that the war swept away the old Europe and marked the beginning of the modern age. Across the continent the German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Turkish Empires collapsed in defeat, and in the case of Russia, a revolution took hold that created the world's first communist state. Britain and France were severely weakened, while a new world power emerged in the form of the United States of America.

The war ended the old balance of power that had provided stability for most of the nineteenth century. As the powerful force of **nationalism** re-emerged, new nation-states were created in central and eastern Europe. By 1919 the map of Europe was significantly changed from 1914; a once-stable Europe had been replaced by a very unstable one. Equally important, the war left much 'unfinished business', and proclaiming peace in 1918 was simply not enough. In Germany, the war left a legacy of great bitterness and anger at the way Germany had been treated by the victorious powers, especially over the removal of Germany territory, the enforced **reparations** and the demand that Germany accept responsibility for the war.

As a result, within a generation war returned to Europe, with Germany once again in conflict with Britain and France, and later Russia and the United States. This war was far more destructive, in terms of both lives lost and damage done, than any other conflict in history. The link between the outcome of World War I and the outbreak of World War II cannot be ignored. World War II was a direct consequence of World War I.

Nationalism and militarism

Nationalism is, essentially, the desire of people of a particular nationality to be a nation, and the way those people identify with a particular place as their nation-state. Nationalism can be a positive force where people join together to become a nation, or it can be a negative force. Extreme or aggressive nationalism is when one nation or national group believes itself to be superior and seeks to challenge the existence of other nation-states. This national rivalry is the most dangerous expression of nationalism.

Modern nationalism emerged with the two great revolutions of the late eighteenth century, the American Revolution from 1775 and the French Revolution from 1789, which created the concept of the nation-state formed by the will of the people.

In the following century, the force of nationalism also created the German nation. In the area of central Europe that we now recognise as Germany, there existed not one nation but a collection of independent kingdoms, of which Prussia was the largest and most powerful. These people were



Nationalism

'Germanic', and shared a sense of cultural nationalism in that they spoke the same language and shared a similar cultural, ethnic and religious background.

In 1871 nationalism was at work when the **chancellor** of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, using war, clever diplomacy and the might of Prussia's military strength, forced a union of these states (except Austria) to create the German nation-state, known then as the German Empire.

Prussia had always been a military state. The French philosopher Voltaire once observed that while most states have an army, Prussia was an army that had a state. In this observation Voltaire was in fact defining **militarism**, another major force that was at work before the outbreak of war in 1914. Militarism exists when a nation values military power above almost all else, and when the military has a strong influence on the government. The needs of the military are prioritised over the needs of the common citizen.

When the promotion of the national interest requires the display of its military power and influence, militarism and more aggressive forms of nationalism become linked. In 1871 the German nation was created through war and the dominance of Prussian military power. The weakness of the democratic spirit in Germany meant that militarism had a solid base in German society. The military played a dominant role in German history until the total defeat of the military machine at the end of World War II in 1945.

Throughout the nineteenth century Europe experienced profound and rapid change. The impact of the industrial revolution was felt in many parts of Europe, leading to rapid economic growth and the transformation of European cities. Of all the European states, Germany was by far the most dynamic. It had experienced the greatest industrial growth, it had the strongest army in Europe, and it was led by **Kaiser** Wilhelm II, a young and erratic leader. The new nation had known only success, and this encouraged an aggressive and militant nationalism. The new nation was motivated by the belief that Germany represented a dynamic, virile culture, and the conviction that Anglo-Saxon (British) culture, which had dominated so much of the world for so long, was in decline. Germany began to follow what was called *Weltpolitik* (world politics). The nation seemed destined to emerge as a new world power.

Imperialism

Another important force at work in the years before the outbreak of war in 1914 was **imperialism**, the quest for colonies and empire-building. Between 1870 and 1900 there was a new push for colonies among the major European states. Most of this scramble took place in Africa, and Germany was among the most aggressive. By 1914 it had an empire of some 2.9 million square kilometres, and almost 15 million people were under German rule. 'We have conquered for ourselves', the Kaiser said in 1901, 'a place in the sun. It will now be my task to see to it that this place in the sun shall remain our undisputed possession.'¹

Imperialism is an expression of both nationalism and militarism. It contains both the will of the nation to impose its authority on others and the ability to achieve it, due to its military and naval power. Imperial rivalry among the great powers added to tensions in Europe in the lead-up to the outbreak of World War I.



In 1871, using the forces of nationalism and militarism, Otto von Bismarck united the Germanic states to create the German nation.



Bismarck



Kaiser Wilhelm's speech, 1901



Kaiser Wilhelm II with members of his officer corps watching army manoeuvres in 1913



The German battleship *Preussen* leads part of a German fleet review in 1907.

All of the European powers had armies to defend their national interests, and in the pre-war years there was a major increase in the size and strength of these military forces. The industrial revolution had transformed industry, while science and technology gave birth to new and more deadly weaponry. Militarism led to an arms race as each nation pushed for stronger armies equipped with the new weaponry. Annual war games were held, where nations tested the effectiveness of their armies and trained for possible deployments in battle. Militarism had always been a feature of the German state, and by 1914 it had an army of 2.2 million men, well trained and equipped for war.

But it was not only on land that military rivalry grew – there was also a massive arms race at sea. Indeed, if there was one single factor that increased the tension between Germany and Britain it was Germany's decision in the 1890s to begin constructing a great German navy. Britain, with its far-flung empire, had the largest navy in the world and saw German naval expansion as a direct threat to its security and its standing as a world power. Kaiser Wilhelm II was obsessed by sea power and Germany began to deliberately challenge the supremacy of the British Royal Navy. Each nation began to build new ships in direct response to the other.

By 1914, when war finally came, Britain had maintained its naval supremacy but at an enormous cost, while Germany had become the world's third-largest naval power, boasting 40 battleships and 57 cruisers.

National rivalry

National rivalry among the great powers of Europe led to the development of a series of alliances in the years before World War I. The key rivalry was the ongoing tension between France and Germany. France had suffered humiliating defeat at the hands of the Germans in 1871 and lost part of its territory, Alsace and Lorraine, to the new

German nation. France's desire for revenge was ever-present, and the nation sought to acquire new areas of German influence in a deliberate attempt to challenge Germany. By 1894, after France had signed an alliance with Russia, Germany had become encircled by two potentially hostile powers.

Germany's one true ally was the Austro-Hungarian Empire, based on a treaty, the Dual Alliance, signed in 1879. When Italy also signed in 1882 this became the Triple Alliance. Under the terms of the Dual Alliance, Austria-Hungary pledged to remain neutral in any war between France and Germany, while Germany pledged support for Austria-Hungary if it was ever attacked by Russia. The possibility of a clash between Russia and Austria-Hungary grew as the years passed, for both nations had ambitions in the Balkans in south-eastern Europe. By 1914 the six major European powers had formed themselves into two rival and dangerous alliance blocs: the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France and Russia).



Europe in 1914 was a continent of powerful empires bound by alliances.

National rivalry was a constant factor in the Balkans, which had once been part of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. As Turkish power rapidly declined in the early twentieth century, this region became one of the most volatile parts of Europe. The force of nationalism had seen first Serbia and then Bulgaria and Montenegro break away from Turkish rule in the nineteenth century, and two Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913 spelt the end of Turkish influence in the region. Austria believed that the threat of nationalism could lead to the break-up of its own multinational empire, and it particularly disliked independent Serbia on its southern border. Serbia was by far the most aggressive of the Balkan states, but what made it even more dangerous was the fact that it had the support of Russia. The Russians saw themselves as the protector of Slav independence, and had long wanted to gain increased access to the Bosphorus, the vital waterway into the Black Sea. A conflict between Austria-Hungary and Russia over the Balkans was always a possibility. In 1914, when Serbia was involved in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, that possibility became a certainty.



WAR IN EUROPE

- ◆ After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815 (and despite some localised smaller conflicts) there was a long period of relative peace on the European continent.
- ◆ The outbreak of World War I in 1914 ended this era of relative peace, and the outcome of the war completely changed the face of Europe.
- ◆ Nationalism and militarism were two powerful forces at work in Europe before 1914, and were key contributors to the outbreak of war.
- ◆ Historians generally agree that the outcome and consequences of World War I were a direct cause of the outbreak of World War II 20 years later.

- 1 Define the following terms and explain how each contributed to the outbreak of war in 1914.
 - i militarism
 - ii nationalism
 - iii imperialism
- 2 Explain why Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II began to create a powerful German navy. What were some of the consequences of this policy of naval expansion?
- 3 Explain the tensions between the following sets of European powers in 1914.
 - i Austria-Hungary and Serbia
 - ii France and Germany
 - iii Germany and Britain
 - iv Russia and Germany
- 4 Outline some of the ways that Europe changed between 1900 and 1914.

1.2

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Planning for war

In times of peace, nations still prepare for war, and by 1914 all of the great European powers had their military plans in place. These plans were constantly being revised to take into account changes to the political conditions. Planning for a possible war was a constant task of the German **General Staff**. Based in the heart of Berlin, this was a highly skilled and efficient planning organisation staffed by the very best military strategists. 'Within the Königsplatz building (in Berlin) the Great General Staff operated like a hugely efficient and well-oiled machine ... so much so that according to some commentators, it was one of only five perfect European institutions, along with the French Opera, the Russian Ballet, the Papal Curia and the British Parliament.'²

The French always saw Germany as their most probable enemy, and by 1913 the French General Staff had just completed Plan XVII, which set out how French forces would be used if war broke out between France and Germany. France's ally Russia also had military plans for any possible war with Germany and its ally, Austria-Hungary. Although Britain had always sought to stay out of European entanglements, Britain's War Office still had plans for the deployment of British troops on mainland Europe should the situation ever arise, while at the nearby Admiralty, plans for the British Navy, the

most powerful navy in the world, were always being modified to meet the changing political situation.

The problem that had occupied Germany's military planners since 1871 was the probability that Germany would have to face France, its longstanding enemy in the west. By 1894 this threat had become more likely after France and Russia signed first a military agreement and then a formal alliance. Russia was now committed to provide military support to France if it were attacked by Germany, and in return the French had pledged to support Russia if it was attacked by Germany, or by Austria-Hungary supported by Germany. If war broke out, Germany faced the prospect of a war on two fronts, against France in the west and its ally Russia in the east.

Three years before the Franco-Russian alliance that triggered this fear of encirclement, Alfred Graf von Schlieffen had become the Chief of the German General Staff. Until that time the German military plans had been defensive in nature, preparing to face an enemy when it crossed the German border. Schlieffen, a keen student of military history, found his hero in the Carthaginian general Hannibal, who had defeated the Romans at the great battle of Cannae in 216 BCE. With a daring military plan that displayed great tactical genius, Hannibal surrounded the entire Roman army and virtually annihilated them in a single day. This daring offensive was not lost on Schlieffen, and it became the core of his plan. By 1906, the year he finally retired, he had finalised a memorandum for action in the event of war. History knows it as the Schlieffen Plan.

Schlieffen believed that the way to win a war against two enemies was to defeat one first and then the other. France, with its mass armies on the German border, presented the more immediate and deadly threat, while Russia, slower to mobilise and to move across the open lands of the east, was seen as the lesser threat.

Under the Schlieffen Plan, Germany had to take the offensive as soon as any war was declared. While a smaller German force faced the main body of the French army on the German border, four German armies would sweep in a great wheeling movement through Luxembourg, Belgium and the southern part of the Netherlands to enter France from the north. A path through the Maastricht Pocket of the Netherlands was included to bypass the Belgian fortresses of Liège and Namur in the valley of the River Meuse. 'France,' Schlieffen wrote, 'must be viewed as a single large fortress', which had to be encircled.³ The wide sweeping movement across Belgium, almost to the English Channel, would then turn south to encircle Paris and outflank the French army. The essence of the plan was daring and above all speed; the timetable provided for France to be defeated in six weeks before the German forces in the east could then be reinforced to face the Russian threat from the east.

Schlieffen's plan factored in the capacity of the rail network to carry the army into battle, as well as the timing and placement of these troop movements. He was aware that violating Belgian neutrality would probably bring Britain into the war, but he was confident that Germany could repel any British forces rushed into Belgium, which indeed is what happened.

Above all, he calculated that the German armies sweeping into France had to be sufficiently strong to achieve the task of advancing to entrap the French forces. He proposed that almost two-thirds of the German troops would be deployed as part of this advancing force. Indeed, Schlieffen himself warned that another 200 000 men were needed with the Army Group I, which had the greatest distance to march, but the capacity of the rail network did not allow it.



Count Alfred von Schlieffen (1833–1913). His military planning formed the basis of the German attack against France in 1914.

Alamy Stock Photo/Granger Historical Picture Archive

Changes to the Schlieffen Plan 1906–1914

When Schlieffen retired in 1906 he was replaced as German Army Chief of Staff by Helmuth von Moltke. Moltke was a supporter of Schlieffen's plan, but as the years passed he made a number of key changes to it.

- ◆ Moltke changed the invasion path from the original wide sweep through the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg to an approach only through Belgium and Luxembourg. This forced the two lead armies, the largest and most powerful part of the thrust towards France, to move in the constricted space from Germany into Belgium, risking possible delay if the Belgians used their fortifications to resist.
- ◆ Moltke was also more concerned about the potential threat of Russia, especially as Russia had advanced its military preparations after being defeated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905. By 1913 Russia had rapidly increased its military capacity, to the point that it would soon be impossible for Germany to defeat Russia. For this reason, Moltke increased the size of the German forces facing the eastern borders, taking troops away from the main force invading France.
- ◆ He also strengthened the German force covering the French-German border in Alsace-Lorraine. Schlieffen had predicted that France would most likely advance into Germany once war was declared, an action that would benefit his overall strategy of encircling the French from the rear. Moltke's thinking, however, was to oppose any advance into Germany, be it from the French in the west or the Russians in the east.



The outbreak of war 1914

The formation of the two opposing alliance blocs increased the danger that some diplomatic crisis or localised conflict could very easily spiral into a major war. Europe had seen its share of diplomatic crises and disputes, but they were all settled and peace prevailed. That luck ran out in the summer of 1914, when a new crisis occurred in the Balkans, triggering a sequence of events that drew most of the great powers into a world war.

On 28 June 1914 the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife were assassinated in the town of Sarajevo, Bosnia – a region that was then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia for the murder, and saw an opportunity to take action against Serbia and eliminate its influence in the Balkans.

However, any action against Serbia would provoke Russia, Serbia's ally, so the role of Germany, Austria's ally, became critical. Before moving against Serbia, Austria-Hungary sought support from

Germany, and on 6 July 1914, the German government gave this support. For Germany, it was important that Austria-Hungary should prove itself as a great power and punish the murder of the Archduke.

Throughout July 1914 there were intense diplomatic moves by all the great powers as Europe moved towards war. France and Russia were allies under the Franco-Russian Alliance of 1897, and France made it clear that it would stand by its ally. Two days later, after a degree of hesitation, Tsar Nicolas II ordered the **mobilisation** of the Russian army. On 1 August 1914, because Russia had mobilised, Germany declared war on Russia. A few hours later France mobilised its armies in support of Russia, and on 3 August, Germany declared war on France.



The car Franz Ferdinand and his wife were travelling in when they were assassinated is now on display in a Vienna museum. A bullet hole can be seen in a side panel.

Countdown to war, July–August 1914



The failure of the Schlieffen Plan

The Schlieffen Plan came into effect when Germany invaded Luxembourg on 2 August 1914 and demanded that the Belgian government grant German forces access to cross the Belgian border. Belgium refused. 'One single vision fills all minds', King Albert of Belgium told his people, 'that of our independence ... One single duty imposes itself upon our wills: the duty of stubborn resistance'.⁴ German troops crossed the Belgian border on 4 August. On the same day, honouring their 1839 treaty with Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany.

The Belgian army, despite its size, offered tenacious resistance. Around Liège and its line of forts, the German advance was slowed by almost a week before Belgian troops fell back towards Antwerp. This Belgian resistance forced Moltke to divert two army corps from the main push south to hold the Belgians at Antwerp.

When the German armies renewed their sweep south towards France they suddenly faced the British for the first time. With a speed totally unexpected by the German planners, a British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had already arrived in Belgium and it engaged the Germans at the Battle of Mons on 23 August 1914. Outnumbered and outgunned by General von Kluck's First Army, the British were forced to withdraw to new positions to the south.

As the German advance continued, the Schlieffen Plan began to fail. Communication between the German army commanders and the military leadership in Luxembourg fell apart. The advancing German armies also failed to encircle Paris. Instead, the armies moved to the east, giving the French army the opportunity to attack their exposed flank. Of equal significance was Moltke's decision at this critical time to move more troops out of France and transfer them to the east to face the Russians. Eleven divisions were removed to fight both in Belgium and in the east, significantly weakening the German right wing.



The July Crisis

The Germans had reached the Marne River, to the north-east of Paris. Here, in what became the first Battle of the Marne in early September 1914, the Germans faced the French 5th and 6th armies and the British Expeditionary Force in battle. The battle ended any chance the Schlieffen Plan had of succeeding. Within easy distance of Paris – so much so that Parisian taxis were used to take French troops to the front – the German advance was stopped. A few days later they were in full retreat, back to new positions on the Aisne River. Both sides began to dig trenches and trench warfare, a defining characteristic of World War I, began.

THE SCHLIEFFEN PLAN

SOURCE A: Schlieffen's vision

The vast bulk (the hammer) of the German armies would assemble on the right flank, wheel through the Maastricht Appendix and Belgium, outflank the French armies and fortresses to the south, then fall into the Seine basin west of Paris and drive the disoriented French onto the German forces anchored in Lorraine. Each bridge taken, each road traversed, each wall breached, and each town stormed was detailed in the great plan down to the hour. War to Schlieffen was not an art, but a science.

Herwig Holger, 'Germany and the "Short-War" Illusion: Toward a New Interpretation?',
The Journal of Military History, vol. 66, no. 3, July 2002, p. 684

SOURCE B: The original German attack plan as at 1905



SOURCE C: The actual German attack and the French response in August – September 1914



QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main points the historian is making in Source A.
- 2 List three differences and three similarities in the placement and movement of German forces based on your study of Source B and Source C.
- 3 Which of the following statements cannot be justified based on the evidence in Sources A and B and C?
 - A In the original plan of 1905, the German First, Second, Third Fourth and Fifth armies were positioned to attack across the German border.
 - B The Maastricht region on the Dutch / German border was attacked in 1914.
 - C In the original plan of 1905 Brussels, the capital of Belgium was to be occupied by German forces.
 - D According to the plans the First German Army had the longest distance to advance.
- 4 Use Source C and your own knowledge to explain why the Schlieffen Plan was unsuccessful.

Although these were often overlooked, Schlieffen himself always held doubts about the plan he had developed, and after retiring in 1906 he still offered suggestions and modifications. Whether the original plan could have succeeded is a subject of historical debate. The fact that Hitler's armies used a variation of the plan with stunning success in 1940, defeating France in the six-week time span Schlieffen had envisaged, suggests that it could have succeeded in 1914, delivering a victory as stunning as the swift victory over France in 1871.

The Schlieffen Plan failed for a number of reasons. Historians point out that the plan used in 1914 had been significantly changed by Schlieffen's successor, Moltke, and argue that its failure was

a result of these changes. Moltke, often depicted as the ‘master’s apprentice’, made fatal changes to the original concept. In his book *Inventing the Schlieffen Plan* (2002), American historian Terence Zuber suggests that the actual term ‘Schlieffen Plan’ was not used until 1920, when the German army was looking for an explanation for the military failure. Anxious to preserve the honour of the army, the generals claimed that Moltke (who had died in 1916) had failed to fully understand Schlieffen’s original strategy, and that some of the commanders in the field had also failed. In the 1920s the German army argued that, had Schlieffen’s original strategy been understood and followed, they would have been victorious.

The main failure of the plan was that the sweep into France, the centrepiece of the manoeuvre, was simply not able to achieve its goal. The fact that Schlieffen himself became preoccupied by this daring sweep suggests that he may also have had his doubts. The swift advance actually slowed down the Germans, and ultimately failed to achieve the aim of encircling the French capital. In part this was due to the fact that both advancing armies had been reduced in strength, both before the war and during the invasion itself. The strict timetable Schlieffen had devised also rapidly fell behind as the Belgians delayed the German advance and then the British Expeditionary Force arrived far more swiftly than anticipated.

The consequences of failure

The major consequence of the failure of the Schlieffen Plan was that the war could not be ended quickly. Schlieffen’s original plan was intended to employ an offensive strategy that would deliver a quick victory in a short war. That did not happen. The plan, based on mobility, instead delivered immobility and years of trench warfare, which turned the conflict into a war of **attrition** and **stalemate**, with each side trying to wear the other down.

The war on the Western Front would now be fought in a narrow corridor of Belgium and north-eastern France. The only real positive for Germany was that the plan had moved the war into their neighbour’s territory. Although the German people suffered in World War I, particularly as a result of the blockage the British were able to impose, most Germans were spared the devastation

that comes with war. It was a different story in World War II, which saw the total destruction of many German cities as well as German industry and infrastructure.

During the war Britain and her Empire mobilised more than 8 million men, France another 8 million, Austria-Hungary 6.5 million, Germany 11 million and the Russian Empire another 12 million. In all, some 60 million were called to action. When it was over, around 8 million were dead and another 20 million wounded. The British historian John Keegan has called World War I a tragic and unnecessary conflict – unnecessary, because the events that led to its outbreak in 1914 might have been stopped had prudence or common goodwill prevailed. When the politicians failed the generals took over, and the drums began to roll.



A German trench on the Western Front in 1915. What Germany intended to be a swift war of conquest became a long war of attrition fought along trench positions in France and Belgium.

THE WAR PLAN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

- ◆ Military leaders of all the European powers had plans of action in the event that their nation became involved in a war.
- ◆ In Germany, the Schlieffen Plan was based on the assumption that Germany would have to face a war on two fronts.
- ◆ Between 1906 and 1914 major changes were made to the Schlieffen Plan.
- ◆ There had been a series of tensions among European states since the late nineteenth century, but general European peace was maintained.
- ◆ A new crisis began after Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, was assassinated by Serbia in June 1914.
- ◆ This dispute between Austria-Hungary and Serbia quickly escalated to involve the major European alliance blocs, and a general European war began in August 1914.
- ◆ The Germans activated the Schlieffen Plan, which carried the war into neutral Belgium and to north-eastern France.
- ◆ By September 1914 the Schlieffen Plan had failed and the war became a long conflict of trench warfare and stalemate, which would last until 1918.

- 1 Explain why the Schlieffen Plan was devised.
- 2 Describe the main theory or strategy behind the Schlieffen Plan.
- 3 Recount how events in Belgium in 1914 contributed to the failure of the Schlieffen Plan. Identify any other factors that contributed to the failure of the plan once it was put into effect.
- 4 'When you march into France, let the last man on the right brush the Channel with his sleeve.' How do you interpret this remark attributed to Alfred von Schlieffen?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain how militarism and nationalism among the great powers influenced the course of international relations before the outbreak of war in 1914.
- 2 How and why did the Schlieffen Plan fail in 1914? What were some of the consequences of that failure?

Endnotes

- 1 Kaiser Wilhelm II, Speech to the North German Regatta Association, 1901.
- 2 Ian Senior, *Invasion 1914: The Schlieffen Plan and the Battle of the Marne*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2012, pp. 28–29.
- 3 Count Alfred von Schlieffen, 'The Schlieffen Plan' (1905), reprinted in Gerhard Ritter, *Der Schlieffenplan: Kritik eines Mythos* [*The Schlieffen Plan: Analysis of a Myth*], Munich, 1956, pp. 145–60.
- 4 Address by King Albert I to the Belgian Parliament, 4 August 1914, in Charles F Horne (ed.), *Source Records of the Great War*, vol. II, National Alumni, 1923.

CHAPTER 2

The German Revolution

2.1

THE LAST OFFENSIVE AND
THE ARMISTICE OF 1918

2.2

DEFEAT AND REVOLUTION,
1918–1919

2.3

GERMANY AND THE TREATY
OF VERSAILLES

German troops, part of the
Berlin Workers' and Soldiers'
Council, firing from the street
and an armoured car in
Berlin, November 1918



Getty Images/Bettmann

9780170410106

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

abdicate

The term used to describe the act of a monarch giving up the throne.

armistice

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

Bolshevik

The name of the largest group within the Russian Social Democratic Party.

The Bolsheviks were led by Lenin and came to power in Russia in November 1917. The term Bolshevik is often used to mean communist.

demilitarised

All weapons, fortifications and military personnel removed.

Fourteen Points

A peace plan of fourteen points put forward by United States president Woodrow Wilson in January 1918.

Germany rejected the proposal at the time.

Reichstag

The lower house of the German parliament.

soviet

A Russian word meaning council. In Russia, councils of workers and soldiers were formed at the time of the Russian Revolution. These soviets became an important part of the Russian Revolution.

The German Revolution



TIMELINE

2.1

THE LAST OFFENSIVE AND THE ARMISTICE OF 1918

Years of stalemate

In 1917 World War I entered its final year. For three and a half years troops from France, Britain and the British Empire had faced the German army along the Western Front, which had become a complex series of trenches and fortifications stretching more than 600 kilometres, from Switzerland to the North Sea. In the last year of the war these mass armies remained in the same regions of Belgium and north-eastern France as where the fighting had begun in 1914.

This had been not only the first great war of the masses but also the first war of industrial Europe. The industrial and scientific revolution during the nineteenth century had generated new technology, which in turn produced new weapons, powerful artillery, gas, barbed wire, machine guns, the aeroplane and, in the closing part of the war, the tank. Despite this weaponry, the mass armies faced off, each trying for a breakthrough. But neither side had the strength to break through the opposing line. Amid a devastated countryside and an ever-mounting toll of killed and wounded, the war of attrition had bogged down to a stalemate.

1917 – entry and departure



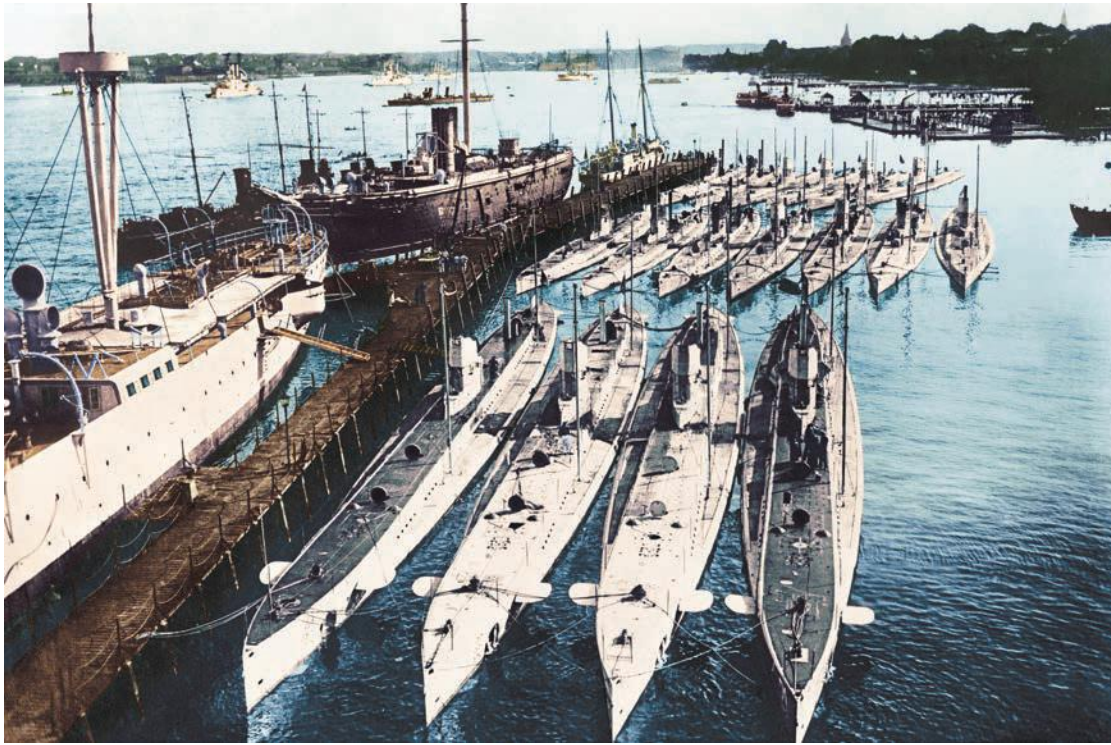
The German Revolution

When the war began, President Wilson had declared the United States to be a neutral nation, and until April 1917 the United States stayed out of the war. But this changed when, from 1 February 1917, Germany began a policy of ‘unrestricted submarine warfare’ in an attempt to break Britain. This meant that all ships, regardless of their nationality, could be sunk if they sought to approach the ports of Britain or France. The German High Command believed that within six months Germany’s fleet of more than 100 U-boats (from the German word *Unterseeboot*, or undersea boat) would force the British to seek peace. But the declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare had another effect that the German High Command had anticipated – their new policy would force 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.

As the United States entered the war another power, Russia, was close to collapse. Despite its vast manpower, Russia was the least industrialised of the great European powers, and after a series of defeats at the hands of the Germans it was facing revolution. In January 1917 strikes and food riots gripped the capital, St Petersburg, and other major cities. Three months later Tsar Nicholas II was forced to **abdicate** and hand over power to a provisional government.

In April 1917 the **Bolshevik** leader Vladimir Lenin had returned to Russia from his exile in Switzerland, after the German government provided him safe passage across Germany. Once in Russia, Lenin set about the task of seizing power from the provisional government and establishing a communist government. The Bolshevik slogan of ‘Peace, Bread and Land’ was simple and effective, and in October they ousted the provisional government.

One of the first acts of the new regime was to take Russia out of the war. The **armistice** between Russia and Germany was signed in December 1917, and three months later, in March 1918, Russia was required to sign the extremely harsh Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which ended the war in the east. Russia lost significant territory including the Ukraine, its Polish and Baltic territories and Finland, all formally part of the old Tsarist Empire.



Part of the German submarine fleet used in World War I. U-boats proved to be far more effective than German surface ships, and they were used in a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare from 1917.

The collapse of Russia in 1917 was balanced in a sense by the United States' entry into the war. In western Europe the three great democracies (Britain, France and the United States) and their allies now stood opposed to German absolutism and militarism. The overthrow of the autocratic Tsarist regime made it easier for the 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. The war would be won by the world's three outstanding democracies.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff

Although Kaiser Wilhelm II was the ruler of Germany, control of the war had long since shifted to the military High Command. By 1916 both the government of Germany and the conduct of the war were effectively in the hands of two men: Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff.

Hindenburg, who was born in 1847, had already retired from the army when World War I began, but in August 1914 he was recalled to 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. It was the beginning of a military partnership that was to last until 1919.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff defeated the Russians in the Battle of Tannenberg in late August 1914 and in a follow-up engagement, the Battle of the Masurian Lakes, effectively ending the Russian threat to Germany's east. Coming at a time when the attack in the west was failing to achieve its goals, the victory over the Russians generated outpourings of joy in Germany. It also created the legend of Hindenburg as a great war hero, although most of the planning and strategy had been Ludendorff's work.



Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg (left) and General Erich Ludendorff at the time of the German victories in the east against Russia.

Hindenburg may have had the reputation, but Ludendorff had the talent, and it was Ludendorff, with his self-imposed sense of duty, his sharp intelligence and his tremendous capacity for detail and hard work, who emerged as the real leader of Germany. Unlike Hindenburg, who came from the Prussian landed gentry, Ludendorff came from a middle-class background. He had to work hard to gain acceptance in the officer class, which had a natural prejudice against men of such humble origin. Ludendorff was a man of strong will with a fanatical drive and ambition to succeed. He was addicted to his work and it was said that 'he had never seen a flower bloom, never heard a bird sing and never watched a sun set'.¹ He had far greater political and administrative skills than Hindenburg, and after 1916 it was Ludendorff who was making not only the military decisions but also the political, economic, domestic and foreign-policy decisions as well.

1918: the last offensive

During the winter of 1917–1918 Ludendorff realised that Germany's only hope of victory lay in a decisive breakthrough on the Western Front before the United States had time to get fully involved in the fighting. Although the United States had declared

war in April 1917, it took time to organise, train, equip and transport American troops to Europe. German confidence was further boosted early in 1918 by the fact that Russia was now out of the war and troops from the former Eastern Front could be moved to strengthen the final push in the west. By March 1918 Ludendorff had almost 750 000 men on the Western Front, reinforced by another 120 000 recalled from industrial production at home.

The German offensive began at dawn on 21 March, the first of five separate offensives along the Western Front. What had been a relatively static front suddenly became mobile. 'From the right, from the left, from behind, everyone was going forward with artillery,' wrote one German soldier to his family. 'My God where have all these people come from? It looks like the migration of a nation.'² In the early weeks of the 1918 offensive German confidence was revived as they pushed first the British and then the French line further to the south. By the end of May, German troops once again reached the River Marne, close to Paris, where they had been in 1914.



Alamy Stock Photo/Everett Collection Historical

A dead German soldier lies atop a munitions cart in the closing weeks of the war.

But Ludendorff's success came at a heavy price. The German advances in 1918 had forced the Allied lines back but they had not broken them. By June the German assault began to weaken, and the essential breakthrough was not achieved. The best of Germany's troops had been used in the initial attacks and by mid-1918 the reinforcements were increasingly the young and the old. Moreover, 100 000 fresh, well-equipped American troops were now poised to enter the conflict, with 250 000 more arriving each month.

Hindenburg and Ludendorff accept defeat

By July, American and French troops began to push the Germans back from the River Marne, and on 8 August 1918 British, Canadian and Australian divisions with more than 400 tanks broke the German line before Amiens. The Allies advanced some 24 kilometres that day, but the psychological impact was far more important. It was 'the black day of the German army in the history of this war', wrote Ludendorff. The confident hope of a German victory had gone. Within a few weeks all the territorial gains of the 1918 offensive were lost. The German army was now on the defensive and was slowly falling back towards the borders of Germany itself.

In the east, as Germany's allies Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary and Turkey faced collapse, Ludendorff's resolve finally broke. On 29 September, at a military conference in south-eastern Belgium, Ludendorff and Hindenburg told Kaiser Wilhelm II and Chancellor von Hertling that the war was lost and that Germany must negotiate an **armistice** with the advancing Allied forces.



The Ludendorff Offensive



Allied counter offensive

LUDENDORFF

SOURCE A: Ludendorff and Hindenburg accept the reality of defeat, 28 September 1918

I had slowly come to this fateful conclusion, and now felt bound and eager to act upon it, whatever others might say, who were not so well informed as to the military situation as I was. In all the great decisions of this war, I have followed my own views with a full sense of my own responsibility.

At six o'clock on the afternoon of the 28th of September, I went down to the Field Marshal's room, which was one floor below mine. I explained to him my views as to a peace offer and a request for an armistice. The position could only grow worse, on account of the Balkan situation, even if we held our ground in the West. Our one task now was to act definitely and firmly, without delay. The Field Marshal listened to me with emotion. He answered that he had intended to say the same to me in the evening, that he had considered the whole situation carefully, and thought the step necessary. We were also at one in the view that the armistice conditions would have to permit a regular and orderly evacuation of the occupied territory.

The Field Marshal and I parted with a firm handshake, like men who have buried their dearest hopes, and who are resolved to hold together in the hardest hours of human life as they have held together in success.

Erich Ludendorff, *My War Memoirs 1914–1918*, English translation, University of Michigan Library, London, 1919, p. 721.

SOURCE B: from Ludendorff's biographer, DJ Goodspeed

As the reports came in from the battlefields, they were brought to Ludendorff in his room at the Hotel Britannique by grave-faced orderly officers. In every sector where the enemy had struck, the German front had given way. Each situation report was more despairing than the last, and there were no adequate reserves. The divisions held for this purpose behind the lines were exhausted, pitifully under strength, and far too few, for the great offensives of the spring and early summer had cost Germany more than a million casualties. By the afternoon of the 28th September, Ludendorff's nerves could stand no more. Suddenly shaken with rage, he lurched to his feet and began to storm and curse against the Reichstag, the Kaiser, the navy and the home front. Those who were with him hastily shut the door and watched appalled while he worked himself up into a frenzy.

At six o'clock that evening, still white and trembling, he went slowly down the stairs to Hindenburg's room one floor below. The Field Marshal and his First Quartermaster-General looked at each other for a long moment without speaking, then Ludendorff haltingly began to outline his reasons for demanding an immediate armistice. As Hindenburg listened, his faded old eyes filled with tears, but at the end he nodded in agreement. Then he stood up and took Ludendorff's right hand in both his own. They parted without further words, 'like men who have buried their dearest hopes'.

DJ Goodspeed, *Ludendorff: Soldier, Dictator, Revolutionary*, Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1966, p. 211.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Sources A and B are two accounts of the decision of the German High Command to seek an armistice. As a historian seeking to understand the event, identify which of the two sources you regard as the more reliable source and why.
- 2 What evidence is there that the historian who wrote Source B in 1966 was influenced by Source A, written in 1919?
- 3 Assess the following statement: The evidence in these sources suggests that Ludendorff, rather than Hindenburg, was the more important military influence on events.
- 4 Identify aspects of Ludendorff's behaviour noted in Source B that are not recorded in Source A. Can you explain why?

Why Germany lost the war

By September 1918 Germany was incapable of achieving victory, and the only remaining options were to face invasion or seek a negotiated peace. In part, the war had been lost almost from the start, when the Schlieffen Plan failed to deliver the swift and overwhelming victory Germany needed. Any extended war, particularly a war on two fronts, was always going to be to Germany's disadvantage. The German nation and its economy were also unprepared to fight a long war. Trade collapsed as the country was blockaded by the might of the British navy; there were serious food shortages, crop failures and eventually starvation, which in 1918 alone claimed more than 290 000 German lives.

The more immediate causes for the military failure were in fact fairly simple. The United States' entry into the war in April 1917 was the decisive factor. With its growing industrial power and the strongest economy in the world, the United States mobilised 2 million men and was soon able to put thousands of fresh well-equipped troops on the Western Front each month. The German policy of unrestricted submarine warfare, a major factor in bringing the United States into the war, had failed, and in 1918 the final great spring offensive, Germany's last throw of the dice, had also failed. Germany's allies Austria-Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria were also in a state of military collapse.

Political change

Throughout the war there had been increasing pressure for changes to the German political system. However, as long as the military held their dominant position and the possibility of victory remained, the prospects of political reform seemed remote. The sudden collapse of the military effort in September 1918 changed everything. Since the Allied powers were not prepared to negotiate with the existing military government, Hindenburg and Ludendorff now demanded that a new government be established that had the support of the **Reichstag**.

On 3 October a reluctant Prince Max von Baden, an able and well-respected politician, was appointed as the new German chancellor. The High Command that had ruled Germany since 1916 handed power back to the chancellor and his cabinet, and on the night he took office, Prince Max dispatched a note to US President Wilson requesting an armistice. Other democratic changes quickly followed that made both the Kaiser and the chancellor answerable to the elected German parliament.

But Ludendorff was motivated by another consideration. The German High Command was looking for a way to shift the responsibility for the defeat to others. The military had failed to win the war, and now the civilian politicians would be forced to make the peace. The most important consideration was to preserve the honour and the standing of the German army. 'The Supreme Command,' wrote Ludendorff, 'does not regard itself as being a power in politics ... it is without political responsibility.'³ The new democratic civilian government would carry the blame for the defeat. 'They must make the peace that has now to be concluded,' he wrote. 'They shall now eat the soup they have brewed for us.'⁴ As part of this process of democratic reform, Hindenburg, now over 70 years old, was once again retired. Ludendorff was dismissed, and left the country for neutral Sweden. Both would later re-emerge in the pages of German history, during the Nazi movement's rise to power.



A German Nationalist poster from 1922 promoting the myth of the ‘stab in the back’ to explain Germany’s defeat in World War I



Dolchstoßlegende

pacifists, war profiteers and Jews. To preserve the honour of the army and Germany’s military tradition, the army leadership was not prepared to be involved with any of the negotiations for the shameful peace.

The legend became a convenient but genuinely held belief, for it shifted the shame of defeat from the army and placed it elsewhere. Although in fact it was the German High Command that had urged an armistice, they never took the blame. The civilian politicians, the so-called ‘November criminals’, were held responsible.

Dolchstoßlegende ‘Stab in the Back’ – preserving the honour of the army

The Germans had been confidently assured of victory, and the news that negotiations had begun to end the war came as a profound shock. The German armies had been victorious in the east and the Russian Empire had collapsed. In the west, the German armies still stood in French and Belgian territory, and earlier in 1918 had got within 80 kilometres of Paris. Now the army was in retreat and military discipline was breaking down.

Among the civilian population at home there was a sense of betrayal, made worse by the severe food shortages and the realisation that it had all been in vain. A mood of hopelessness and unrest grew in Germany, and the belief took root among many Germans that their country had not been defeated, but rather, betrayed.

The Swiss newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* wrote, ‘As far as the German army is concerned the general view is summarised in these words – it was stabbed in the back by the civilian population.’ This became the so-called ‘stab-in-the-back’ legend, or *Dolchstoßlegende*, a belief deliberately encouraged by the right-wing conservative forces in Germany and by the army command itself. The German army, it was claimed, had not failed; rather, it had been betrayed, and the scapegoats for the defeat were easily found – socialists,

THE STAB IN THE BACK

Historian John Wheeler-Bennett on the origins of the 'stab-in-the-back' legend

One evening in the summer of 1919 while dining with the head of the British Military Mission, Major General Sir Neil Malcolm, Ludendorff was explaining how the Supreme Command had been 'betrayed' by the revolution on the home front. His style of speech was turgid and verbose and in an effort to clarify the meaning in a single sentence, General Malcolm asked, 'Do you mean General that you were stabbed in the back?'. Ludendorff's eyes lit up and he leapt upon the phrase like a dog on a bone. 'Stabbed in the back', he repeated. 'Yes that is it exactly. We were stabbed in the back.'

Richard Pares & Alan JP Taylor, *Essays Presented to Sir Lewis Namier*, Macmillan, London, 1956, p. 535.

From the historian Ian Kershaw

In reality, of course, there had been no treachery, no 'stab-in-the-back'. This was a pure invention of the Right, a legend the Nazis would use as a central element of their propaganda armoury. Unrest at home was a consequence, not a cause of military failure. Germany had been militarily defeated ... At home, the mood was one of mounting protest – embittered, angry, and increasingly rebellious.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, London, 1998, p. 97.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what the 'stab-in-the-back' legend was.
- 2 What impact do you think the 'stab-in-the-back' legend had on German civilians?
- 3 Why does Kershaw believe the legend was an 'invention of the Right'?
- 4 What, according to Kershaw, was one of the longer-term consequences of the 'stab-in-the-back' legend?

THE END OF THE WAR

- ◆ In early 1917 Germany began a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. In April 1917 the United States entered World War I after Germany began to sink American ships.
- ◆ In October 1917 the new Bolshevik (communist) government in Russia sued for peace.
- ◆ After Russia's defeat, Germany believed it could win the war by delivering a knockout offensive on the Western Front before the United States became fully involved in the war.
- ◆ Ludendorff planned and launched the great German offensive on the Western Front in March 1918. Despite initial success, by August 1918 it was clear that the offensive had failed.
- ◆ Ludendorff and Hindenburg accepted the reality of defeat and demanded that the German government negotiate an armistice to end the war.
- ◆ The military High Command handed power back to the Reichstag and the civilian politicians in order to avoid having to make the peace.
- ◆ The politicians, not the army, were to carry the blame for the defeat.
- ◆ Encouraged by right-wing circles and the army leadership, a belief grew that Germany had been betrayed rather than defeated; it had been 'stabbed in the back'.

- 1 Explain why the United States entered World War I in April 1917. How did the entry of the United States affect the course and outcome of the war?
- 2 What did the German leadership hope to achieve as a result of the Spring Offensive of March 1918?
- 3 Identify two key reasons why the Spring Offensive failed and two consequences of this failure.
- 4 What was the long-term impact of the civilian politicians signing the armistice?

2.2

DEFEAT AND REVOLUTION, 1918–1919

The Kiel mutiny

The so-called November Revolution in Germany was triggered by a mutiny in the German navy. Apart from two naval battles, at Dogger Bank (1915) and Jutland (1916), most of the surface fleet had remained inactive throughout the war. However, in the closing days of the conflict, in November 1918, the Supreme Naval Command, determined to restore the honour of the service, decided to launch an attack on the vastly superior British fleet. But 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 nearby naval port of Kiel, where the workers joined them in protest.



Kiel mutiny

Workers' and Soldiers' Councils

The Kiel Workers' and Soldiers' Council was set up in November 1918. It was a political association made up of workers and returning soldiers, modelled on the **soviets** that had sprung up during the Russian Revolution. Within days, the revolutionary action in Kiel spread to other cities, and by the first week of November, Workers' and Soldiers' Councils were functioning in Lübeck, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig, Bremen and other northern German cities.

The sudden appearance of these Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was the result of sheer frustration, war weariness and disillusionment on the part of workers and returning soldiers. In most cases the councils, which took control of the local city governments, were led by moderate socialists who now demanded democracy, freedom of speech, social reform, the release of political prisoners, the removal of the Kaiser and the immediate end of the war.

The Bavarian Republic

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. The Bavarian monarchy was abolished and a new government, led by the radical socialist Kurt Eisner, claimed power. Civil unrest and the breakdown of order were spreading across Germany as a sense of defeat and disillusionment grew.

The abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II

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 High Command also believed that, for the sake of Germany, the Kaiser had to go. But Wilhelm II resisted all pressure to abdicate.

Hindenburg, as a soldier who had devoted his life to the monarchy, did not have the courage to face the Kaiser. With tears running down his face, he remained silent as General Wilhelm Groener, Ludendorff's successor, told the Kaiser that he no longer had the support of the army or the nation. A few hours later, on 10 November 1918, the Kaiser left Germany for exile in Holland. He was to spend the rest of his life in exile, and never saw Germany again.

Germany becomes a republic

On the day the Kaiser's abdication was announced, Prince Max von Baden also stepped down as chancellor. He handed the government of Germany to Friedrich Ebert, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the largest political group in the Reichstag. 'Herr Ebert, I am entrusting you with the German Empire,' Prince Max said. 'I have lost two sons for this Empire,' Ebert replied.⁵

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 decide whether Germany would become a republic, but it was too late now. At the end of a momentous day the Kaiser was gone, the Social Democratic Party had been handed power, and Imperial Germany had become Republican Germany.



Abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II



Proclamation of the Republic



A French postcard from 1918 representing the defeat of Imperial Germany by the victorious allied powers



Philipp Scheidemann (Deputy Chancellor) declared Germany a republic during a speech on 9 November 1918.

NOVEMBER 1918

SOURCE A: Philipp Scheidemann recalls the events of November 1918

On the morning of 9 November 1918, the Reichstag was like an armed camp. Working men and soldiers were going in and out. Many bore arms ...

The main lobby presented a dramatic spectacle. Guns were piled up in stacks. In the hall thousands of hustling men seemed to be talking and shouting at the same time. I intended to speak to the crowd from a window ... the shouts of the crowd sounded like a mighty chorus. Then there was silence. I only said a few words which were received with tremendous cheering.

Workers and soldiers, the cursed war is at an end. Murder has ceased. The Emperor has abdicated. The people have triumphed over them all along the line. Prince Max von Baden has handed over his office as Chancellor to Ebert. Workers and soldiers, realise the historic importance of today. Miracles have happened. Everything for the people, everything by the people. Nothing must be done that brings dishonour to the Labour movement. Stand united and loyal. The old and the rotten—the monarchy—has broken down. Long live the new! Long live the German Republic!

Philipp Scheidemann, *The Making of New Germany: The Memoirs of Philipp Scheidemann*, D Appleton and Co, New York, 1929, p. 582.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why there was chaos and disorder in Germany in early November 1918.
- 2 Who does Scheidemann claim the new Republic is for?
- 3 What was the significance of Philipp Scheidemann's speech on 9 November 1918?
- 4 How would the extract from Scheidemann's memoir be useful to a historian? What would be some of its limitations?

SOURCE B: The German Revolution: a newspaper editorial

Words cannot suffice to explain the indignation and the grief ... the great edifice [structure] for which our fathers fought with their blood—wiped out by treason in the ranks of our own people. Germany yesterday still unconquered, now left at the mercy of her enemies by men bearing the name of Germans, forced to her knees in disgrace by crime in her own ranks!

The German socialists knew that peace was in the offing and that it was merely a matter of facing the enemy for a few weeks with a firm front to extract tolerable conditions from him. In this situation they hoisted the white flag. This is an evil that can never and shall never be forgiven. It is an act of treason towards the German people.

Deutsche Tageszeitung, 10 November 1918.

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to the newspaper editorial (Source B), who has committed treason?
- 2 Identify which classes or groups in German society would support the views of the *Deutsche Tageszeitung*.
- 3 According to Source B, what should the German socialists have done?
- 4 Does Source B support or oppose the 'stab-in-the-back' legend? Use evidence from the source to support your answer.

The Armistice, 11 November 1918

On 8 November, two days after President Wilson had informed the German government that the Allies were prepared to grant an armistice, Matthias Erzberger, a minister in the German government, along with other members of the German armistice commission, left Berlin to sign the document that would end the war. 'May God travel with you,' Hindenburg told Erzberger, 'and see that you succeed in attaining the best that can still be secured for the Fatherland.'⁶

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. He 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 were rejected by the Allies, leaving the government in Berlin no option. The German representatives were instructed to sign the armistice agreement, which they did at 5 am on 11 November. The war ended six hours later.



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The German delegation, led by Matthias Erzberger, sign the armistice on 11 November 1918.

The Social Democratic Party

When World War I broke out in 1914, the largest political party in the Reichstag was the Social Democratic Party, or *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD). The SPD championed the cause of the working class and the demand for increased political democracy in the state. It had become a reformist party, and sought power and influence not by threatening to destroy the state but by working within the political structure to change it. It did not believe that a working-class revolution was needed to achieve its goals. The growth of the German trade union movement and a general improvement in the conditions of the working class reduced the likelihood of a working-class revolution. By 1914 the SPD held 110 seats in the Reichstag, and with over 1 million members, it was in fact the largest political party in the world.

Moderate socialism

- Represented by the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), founded in 1875.
- Moderate and supportive of the democratic system.
- It came to power in 1918 with the collapse of the monarchy.
- Led by Friedrich Ebert and Philipp Scheidemann.

Radical socialism

- Represented by the German Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD).
- Formed by a number of left-wing members of the German Social Democratic Party who split with the party in 1917.
- Demanded more radical social and economic change.
- Led by Karl Kautsky.

The Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD)

The *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD) was a smaller, more extreme political group that had split from the SPD in 1917. While the SPD's priority was the need to preserve order and elect a new German parliament that would carry through democratic reforms, the USPD believed that changes had to occur within Germany's social structure before democracy could function.

Friedrich Ebert

The new chancellor, Friedrich Ebert, was the leader of the SPD. He and his party had come to power unprepared and unexpectedly, and their most urgent priority was the need to establish order amid the disorder that threatened the state. Ebert was an able and practical politician with a clear understanding of the demands and dangers facing Germany. These included disillusioned soldiers returning from the war and the possibility of civil war and revolutionary uprising from the extreme left. 'I do not want it,' he told Prince Max von Baden. 'In fact I hate it like sin.' The socialist newspaper *Vorwärts* shared



Friedrich Ebert, German chancellor during the revolutionary upheavals of 1918–1919 and the first president of the Weimar Republic

Ebert's concern. 'Socialism is organisation,' it wrote in November 1918, 'disorganisation is the worst enemy of socialism.'⁸

Ebert believed that the revolution was over, and although the government carried through some immediate reforms (guaranteeing freedom of speech and assembly, releasing political prisoners, and granting an eight-hour day and a system of unemployment benefits), the government's main aim was to proceed to democratic elections for a new National Assembly (a parliament). This new body would have the task of addressing the great problems Germany faced. However, for the extreme groups of German politics the real revolution was yet to come.

The threat to Ebert and the moderate socialists of the SPD came not from their traditional opponents – the conservative forces of the right – but from the demands of the radical or extreme left.

The Ebert–Groener Pact

The night Ebert became chancellor, General Groener, Ludendorff's successor, telephoned Ebert on a secret line between the military headquarters and the chancellery. The military leadership feared not only the extreme left but also the disintegration of military discipline in the armed forces. In return for maintaining discipline and order in the army, the military was prepared, in General Groener's words, to 'put itself at the government's disposal'.⁹ The pact between Ebert and Groener had important implications:

- ◆ In the short term, the right-wing army leadership, despite the fact that it had little sympathy for the new republic, was prepared to support a moderate left-wing socialist government against elements that threatened the stability of the republic.
- ◆ In the long term, the pact allowed the German army to retain its influence and to become a key political force in the future republic.

THE EBERT–GROENER PACT

SOURCE A: General Groener writes to his wife about the pact with Ebert, 17 November 1918

The Field Marshal and I intend to support Ebert whom I estimate as a straightforward, honest and decent character as long as possible so the cart does not slide further to the left. But where is the courage of the middle class? That a tiny minority could simply overthrow the whole German Empire is one of the saddest events of the whole history of the German nation. During four years the German people stood unbroken against a world of enemies — now it permits a handful of sailors to knock it down as if it were a dummy.

Francis Carsten, *The Reichswehr and Politics 1918–1933*, OUP, London, 1966, p. 12.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why the army leadership was prepared to support Ebert's socialist government.
- 2 Explain what General Groener meant by the remark 'so the cart does not slide further to the left'.
- 3 What were the benefits and the dangers of allowing the German Army to retain its influence?

The Stinnes–Legien Agreement, November 1918

German industry and big business were also concerned by the revolutionary disorders in November 1918, particularly the unrest in the working class. On 15 November, amid the revolutionary upheavals of that month, an agreement was signed between the leader of the German trade unions, Carl Legien, and a spokesman for the industrialists, Hugo Stinnes. Known as the Stinnes–Legien Agreement, it was an arrangement that suited both business and the German workers and delivered an important element of industrial cooperation. Employers accepted the concept of an eight-hour day for German workers, and workers were also given the right to collective bargaining with their employers.

This rare example of cooperation between German big business and the German workers was one of the reasons why a period of conflict between workers and employers did not eventuate in Germany. German trade unions gained significant benefits, and went on to cooperate with employers to preserve order and a measure of stability. It was one of the most important achievements of the German revolution.

The threat from the extreme left

The war ended in November 1918, but the suffering continued. More than 3 million war-weary troops, who after 11 November had begun their orderly retreat back across the Rhine, returned to a country facing a bitter winter, made worse by the severe food shortages (the Allied blockade continued until July 1919). Many returning soldiers found only hardship and unemployment. In January 1919 in Berlin alone the unemployed numbered some 250 000. Unemployed workers were a ready audience for the radical political messages of the extreme left.

The Spartacist uprising, January 1919

At the extreme left of German politics was the *Spartakusbund* (the Spartacist League), led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. It took its name from the famous Thracian gladiator Spartacus, who had defied the authority of Rome in 73 BCE. The Spartacists were true revolutionaries, refusing to recognise the authority of the state and committed to the concept of world revolution. Inspired by Russian communism, they wanted to overthrow the Ebert government and establish a soviet republic in Germany.

Through their newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag) and in a series of mass meetings and demonstrations, the Spartacists urged counter-revolution. They believed that the true revolution of the working class was yet to take place, and in the cold and hungry winter of 1918 political discontent grew. In late December the Spartacists held their first congress and declared themselves to be the Communist Party of Germany, *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD).

In early January 1919 demonstrations broke out in Berlin over the dismissal of the Berlin Police Chief, Emil Eichhorn, a member of the USPD and a supporter of the radical left. Encouraged by the size of the working-class protest, a group

Extreme socialism

- Represented by the Spartacist League until 1919.
- Becomes Communist Party of Germany, *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD).
- A Marxist revolutionary movement that believed Germany should follow the example of the Bolsheviks in Russia and create a state based on the rule of the working class.
- Their attempted uprising in 1919 was suppressed.
- Leaders were Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.



Rosa Luxemburg, one of the leaders of the far left-wing Spartacist League, in 1905



Liebknecht's declaration

within the Spartacists sought to seize power. In Russia in 1917 a second revolution had carried the Bolsheviks to power over the moderate socialists; now in Germany in 1918 a second revolution sought to achieve the same goal.

A number of key buildings in Berlin were seized, including the railway station and the office of the socialist newspaper *Vorwärts*, and a revolutionary committee declared the Ebert government deposed.

Counter-revolution: Gustav Noske and the Freikorps

Ebert had anticipated the possibility of an armed revolt by the extreme left, and in December 1918 he had appointed a fellow socialist, Gustav Noske, to be Defence Minister. 'Someone must be the bloodhound,' Noske is reputed to have said. 'I won't shirk the responsibility.'¹⁰

Although the army had secretly pledged to support the government, Noske saw the **Freikorps** (Free Corps) units as a more reliable instrument to counter any threat from the extreme left. The Freikorps were volunteer groups of ex-soldiers who formed themselves into independent military units under former officers. In the unsettled situation in Germany in November 1918, almost 400 000 former soldiers were involved with the Freikorps as they emerged all over the country. Politically they were unreliable, and although they had little sympathy for the moderate socialist government in Berlin, they saw the threat of communism as the more immediate and present danger.

The Ebert government, almost besieged in the chancellery, ordered Gustav Noske to restore order in the capital. Noske's Freikorps units carried out their task with some brutality; buildings seized by the Spartacists were recaptured, and after three days of fighting on the streets of Berlin the Spartacist uprising was crushed. The Spartacists, who were mainly civilians, were no match for the Freikorps with their military training, and more than 150 Spartacists were killed. Among those who died 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.



Freikorps



The Bavarian Republic



The Werdenfelser Freikorps unit, wearing traditional Bavarian clothing, marching through the streets of Munich after the suppression of the Bavarian Soviet Republic in May 1919

Unrest in Bavaria

The events in Berlin in January 1919 were repeated in other German cities, including Bremen, Düsseldorf and Wilhelmshaven. When communists and radical workers proclaimed the city of Bremen to be a Workers' Republic, Noske ordered the Freikorps to put down the uprising. In the southern state of Bavaria, which Kurt Eisner had declared to be a socialist republic, a declaration that helped trigger the November Revolution, there was even more violence. In the elections for the Bavarian parliament in February 1919, Eisner's USPD was defeated, and a few days later Eisner himself was assassinated. In the political chaos that followed, the defiant communists, despite the hopelessness of their situation, declared Bavaria to be a communist republic.



imagefolk/fine-art-images

Was will Spartakus? (What does Spartakus Represent?), a poster produced by the Spartacist League 1919

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do you think the Spartacists created this poster?
- 2 Who are the Spartacists' enemies, as depicted in this poster?
- 3 Explain why the Spartacist uprising had little chance of success in 1919.
- 4 Which of the following statements cannot be supported by the historical facts?
 - A The Spartacists were suppressed by the will of the moderate left-wing government with support from right-wing groups in German society.
 - B After 1919 the Spartacists became part of the German Communist Party (KPD).
 - C The Spartacist movement took inspiration and example from the Communist revolution in Russia in 1917.
 - D The Freikorps provided military support for the Spartacist uprising.
- 5 Why would the moderate left want to put down the Spartacists' revolt?

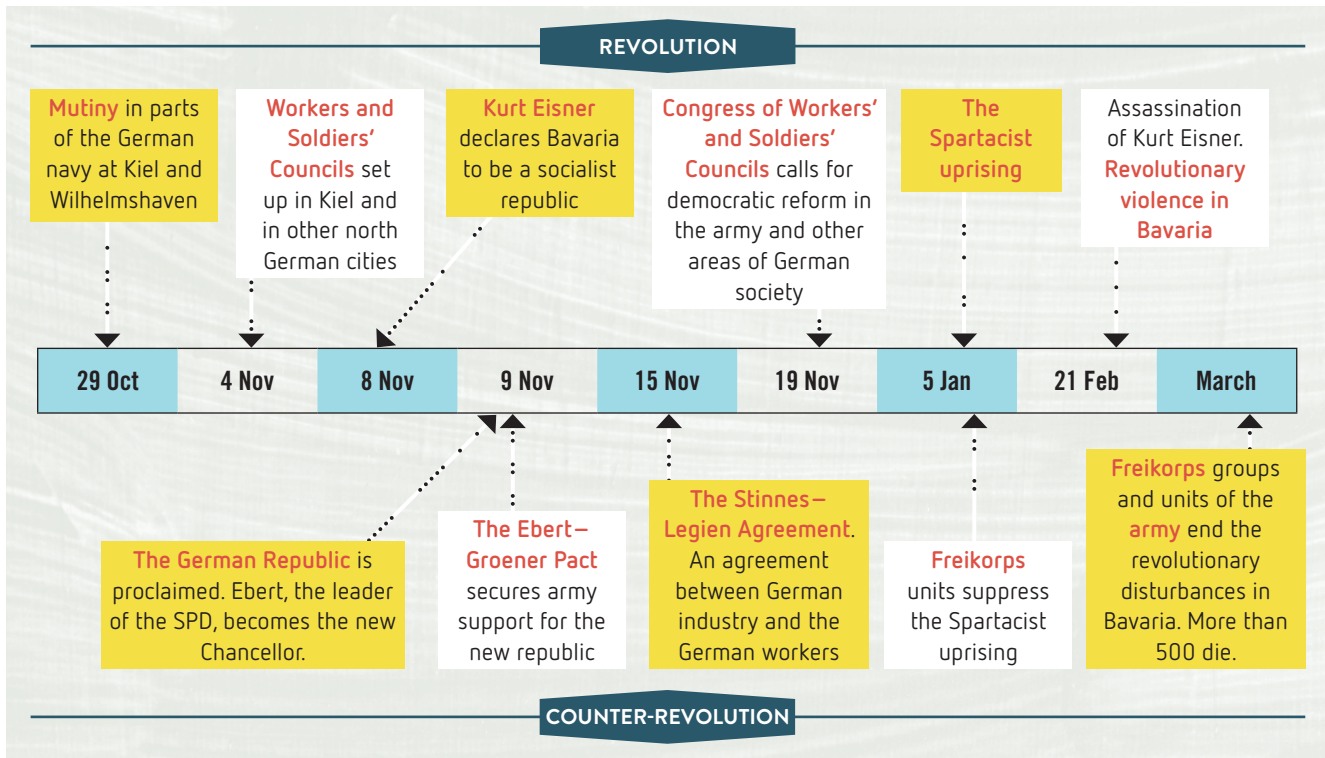
The suppression of counter-revolution

The government of Berlin ordered the suppression of the revolts in Bavaria, and the Freikorps, along with units of the regular army, moved on the Bavarian capital, Munich. Throughout April and May the radical protests were crushed and more than 500 people were killed. One man who observed the political violence in Munich in 1919 was a 30-year-old ex-soldier who had returned to the city after service in the war. His name was Adolf Hitler.

The Spartacist uprising and the other attempts at political violence in 1919 were an important feature of the German Revolution:

- ◆ In the face of this revolutionary threat from the far left, the elected German government needed the support of the force of the right, the Freikorps and the German army to ensure its survival. Even after defeat in war, the role of the German army was important in determining the government of Germany.

- ◆ The revolutionary activity of 1919 also left a deep and enduring hatred within the forces of the left, and in particular between the SPD and the German communists. The communists, and others on the extreme left, could never forgive Ebert and the moderate socialist government for ordering right-wing military groups like the Freikorps to suppress the uprising.
- ◆ A great distrust grew between the parties of the left, and the division never healed. This division was one of the reasons the left was less able to resist the rise of the extreme right in the form of the Nazis in the early 1930s.



Revolution and counter-revolution 1918–1919

Freikorps troops watch over Unter den Linden from their position on top of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin during the Spartacist uprising in January 1919



imagefolk/Mary Evans Picture Library

THE UNREST OF 1919

- ◆ Ebert established a provisional government called the Council of People's Representatives.
- ◆ Both Ebert's government and the army feared disorder and a revolutionary threat from the extreme left.
- ◆ General Groener gave Ebert the support of the German army to defend the state from the extreme left.
- ◆ At best, the German army tolerated the new republic because the right-wing army leadership feared disorder and the threat from the extreme left.
- ◆ The government supported the formation of the Freikorps to help counter threats from the extreme left.
- ◆ In January 1919 the Spartacist uprising took place and was suppressed by the Freikorps.
- ◆ The government also ordered the suppression of the extreme left in Bavaria.
- ◆ The fact that Ebert's socialist government had used the army and the Freikorps to suppress the threat from the extreme left caused a deep bitterness in the left, which would endure until the victory of the extreme right (the Nazis) in 1933.

1 Identify the main revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces at work in Germany in 1918–1919.

2 Match each term in Group A with its description or action in Group B.

GROUP A

Karl Liebknecht

Groener

Reichstag

Spartacists

Philipp Scheidemann

Matthias Erzberger

Freikorps

GROUP B

The German parliament

A leader of the Spartacist movement

Declared the new Republic in November 1918

Military units mainly consisting of right-wing ex-soldiers

Ludendorff's successor

An extreme left-wing political group

Signed the armistice on 11 November 1918

3 Identify the main left-wing groups in Germany in 1918–1919. Which of these groups was the most extreme and which was the most moderate? Explain how and why these left-wing groups were divided.

4 Outline some of the reasons why the Spartacist uprising of 1919 failed.

5 Why was a left-wing revolution launched in Germany immediately after World War I and why did it fail?

2.3

GERMANY AND THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

In late April 1919, a German delegation led by the foreign minister Count Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau arrived in France to receive details of the peace settlement. A few days later, at a brief ceremony at the Trianon Palace at Versailles, two copies of the treaty – one in English and one in French – were handed to the Germans. ‘The hour has struck for the weighty settlement of our account,’ the French leader Georges Clemenceau told the Germans. ‘You have asked for peace. We are disposed to give it to you.’¹¹

The terms of the Treaty of Versailles came as a great shock to the Germans. Germany had sought an armistice in November 1918 and expected the peace settlement to be based on President Wilson’s **Fourteen Points**. They also expected a moderate peace from the democracies of Britain, France and the United States, especially since Germany itself was now a democracy.

Instead, the Germans had been allowed no say in the drafting of the peace. This was a peace imposed by the victors – the German word often used was *diktat* (an imposed peace) – and it was shaped in large measure by the French determination to ensure that Germany would never again threaten France.

The Germans had arrived at Versailles expecting that negotiations would take place, and they actually carried a list of concessions that the German government was prepared to make. But there was to be no negotiation. Germany was given 15 days to respond, and would then be required to sign the treaty.



Getty Images/Hulton Archive



A German tank being destroyed in 1919 as part of the disarmament requirement of the Treaty of Versailles

The terms of the treaty

Military provisions

- ◆ The German army was to be reduced to 100 000 men, and Germany was forbidden to produce heavy guns, poisonous gas or tanks. Compulsory military service was banned, the German General Staff was abolished, military academies were to be closed, and Germany was forbidden to develop an air force.
- ◆ The German navy was to be reduced to a few ships for coastal patrols. Submarines were strictly forbidden.

Territorial provisions

- ◆ Alsace and Lorraine, the territories Germany took from France in 1871, were to be returned to France.
- ◆ The rich German coal-producing area of the Saar Basin was to be placed under international control for 15 years, with its valuable coal resources going to France.
- ◆ The region of Posen was given to the new nation of Poland. 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.
- ◆ Austria became a separate country, and any future union between Germany and Austria (known as Anschluss) was strictly forbidden.

Colonial provisions

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

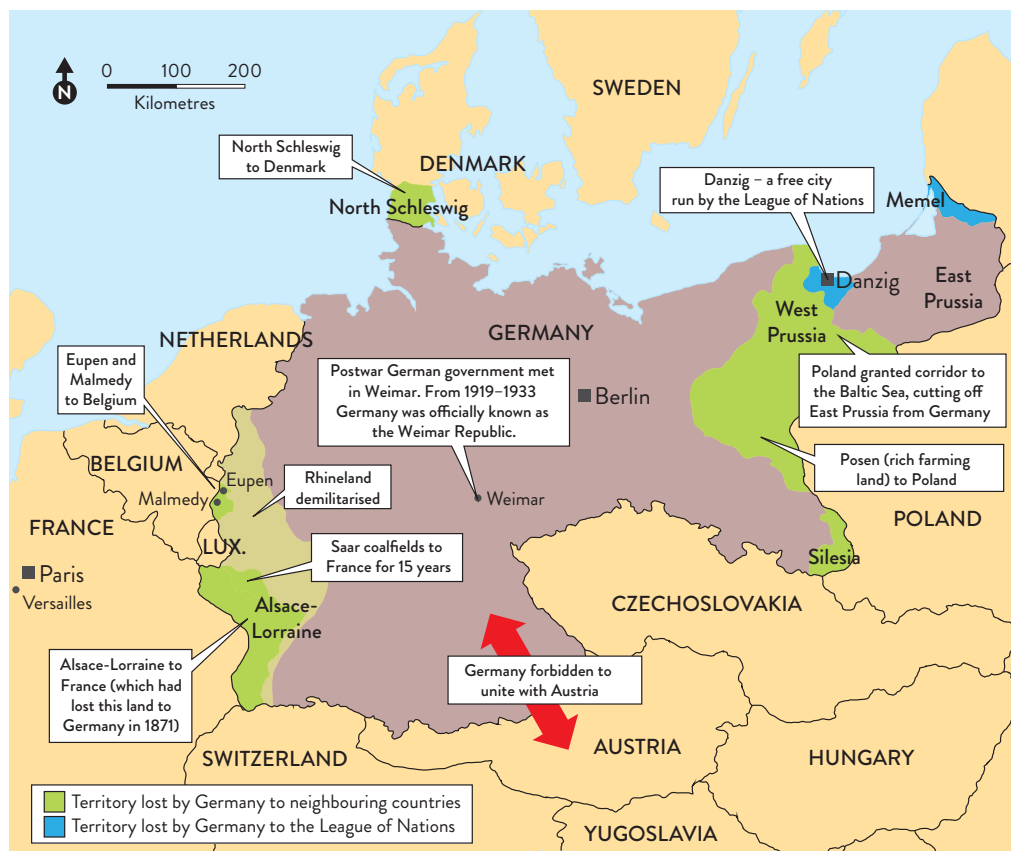
Reparations

- ◆ Germany was to pay the cost of the war. The final reparation figure of 132 000 million gold marks (US\$32 billion) was not arrived at until 1921.



War guilt

- ◆ Germany was to accept responsibility for the war. Clause 231 of the treaty soon became known as the 'war guilt clause', which required Germany to accept 'all the losses which the Allied and Associated Powers have suffered as a consequence of the war forced upon them by the attack of Germany and its Allies'.



Germany under the Treaty of Versailles

RESPONSES TO THE TREATY

SOURCE A: The Allied response to the German government's protest that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh, 16 June 1919

In the view of the Allied and Associated Powers, the war which began on August 1, 1914, was the greatest crime against humanity and the freedom of peoples that any nation calling itself civilised has ever consciously committed ... The conduct of Germany is almost unexampled in human history. The terrible responsibility which lies at her door can be seen in the fact that not less than seven million dead lie buried in Europe, while more than twenty million others carry upon themselves the evidence of wounds and sufferings because Germany saw fit to gratify her lust by resort to war.

It is said that the German Revolution ought to make a difference and that the German people are not responsible for the policy of the rulers whom they have thrown from power.

The Allied and Associated Powers recognise and welcome the change. But it cannot affect the settlement itself. Throughout the war, as before the war, the German people supported the war, subscribed the war loans, and obeyed every order, however savage, of their government, for at any moment they could have reversed it. They cannot now pretend, having changed their rulers after the war was lost, that it is justice that they should escape the consequences of their deeds.

Alma Luckau, *The German Delegation at the Paris Peace Conference*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1941, p. 415.

SOURCE B: Editorial from the German newspaper *Deutsche Zeitung*, 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.

Koppel Pinson, *Modern Germany*, Macmillan, London, 1966, p. 398.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why the Allies were still determined to punish Germany after 1918, even though Germany was now a democracy.
- 2 What evidence does Source A provide that the German people supported the Kaiser and the war?
- 3 What is Source B suggesting will happen in the future?
- 4 Do you think Source B accurately reflects the mood in Germany in June 1919?
- 5 How would a newspaper article be useful to a historian? What would be some of its limitations?

Germany's reaction to the Treaty of Versailles

Germany's immediate reaction to the terms of the treaty was shock and anger. Chancellor Scheidemann announced that the government would not accept it. 'We must hold together, we must stick together. We are one flesh and one blood,' the chancellor told the Reichstag in May 1919. 'What hand would not wither that binds itself and us to these fetters [chains].'¹²

But despite the anger and emotional outbursts, the reality was that the German government had very little choice but to accept the treaty. The Allied powers were prepared to resume the war if Germany did not sign. They had also maintained a brutal blockade of Germany after the armistice

was signed, which caused severe food shortages and ultimately accounted for the deaths of many thousands of Germans before it was finally lifted in June 1919.

Many in Germany, including Chancellor Scheidemann and Field Marshal von Hindenburg, urged outright rejection of the treaty. Although Hindenburg clearly understood the consequences of doing so, and was well aware that the Germans had no prospect of victory in the west if the war was resumed, Hindenburg's whole life and purpose had been the German army. In 1918 he had urged an end to the war and then stood aside and let the civilian politicians negotiate the peace. In 1919 it was again the civilian politicians who would carry the shame of accepting the peace treaty. Either way, the honour and reputation of the German army was to be preserved.

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 officer corps would be destroyed and the name of Germany would disappear from the map'.¹³

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

SOURCE A: Field Marshal von Hindenburg urges rejection of the Treaty of Versailles, 17 June 1919

At the resumption of hostilities we would be militarily in a position to reconquer the province of Posen and to hold our frontiers in the East. In the West, given the numerical superiority of the Entente [Britain and France] and its opportunity to outflank us on both sides, we can scarcely count on success if our enemy mounts a serious offensive. A favourable outcome to the whole operation is therefore very doubtful, but as a soldier I must prefer honourable defeat to a shameful peace.

Quoted in Otto-Ernst Schuddekopf, *Das Heer und die Republik*, Norddt. Verlagsanstalt, Hannover, 1955, p. 94.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why Hindenburg would have given this advice about rejecting the Treaty of Versailles.
- 2 Evaluate how realistic this advice was, given the political and military situation in 1919.

Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles

On 22 June Chancellor Scheidemann resigned rather than sign the treaty, and a new government of the 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, near Paris, 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.



The signing of the Treaty of Versailles in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, 28 June 1919

HAROLD NICOLSON (A BRITISH POLITICIAN) DESCRIBES THE SIGNING OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES, 28 JUNE 1919

We enter the Hall of Mirrors. It is divided into three sections. At the far end are the press already thickly installed. In the middle there is a horse-shoe table for the plenipotentiaries [diplomats]. In front of that, like a guillotine, is the table for the signatures ...

And then, isolated and pitiable, come the two German delegates, Dr Müller and Dr Bell. The silence is terrifying. They keep their eyes fixed away from those two thousand staring eyes, fixed upon the ceiling.

They are deathly pale. They do not appear as representatives of a brutal militarism. The one is thin and pink eye-lidded, the other is moon faced and suffering. It is all most painful.

They are conducted to their chairs. Clemenceau [the French Prime Minister] at once breaks the silence. 'Gentlemen,' he rasps, 'the session is open.' He adds a few ill-chosen words. 'We are here to sign a Treaty of Peace.' Then St Quentin advances towards the Germans and with the utmost dignity leads them to the little table on which the Treaty is expanded. There is general tension. They sign. There is general relaxation ... Suddenly from outside comes the crash of guns thundering in salute. It announces to Paris that the second Treaty of Versailles has been signed by Dr Müller and Dr Bell.

Through a few open windows comes the sound of distant crowds cheering hoarsely ... We keep our seats while the Germans were conducted like prisoners from the dock, their eyes still fixed upon some distant point of the horizon. We still keep our seats to allow the Big Five to pass down the aisle, Wilson, Lloyd George, the Dominions [parts of the British Empire, including Australia], others. Finally Clemenceau. Painleve who was sitting one off from me rose to greet him. He stretched out both his hands and grasped Clemenceau's right glove. He congratulated him. 'Yes,' said Clemenceau, 'it is a good day.' There were tears in his bleary eyes.

Harold Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, Methuen, London, 1933, p. 368.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Harold Nicolson was an eyewitness to the event and a member of the British delegation. How might this influence his observations?
- 2 Why would Clemenceau have stated that it was 'a good day'?
- 3 How would Nicolson's observations be useful to a historian?

The Treaty of Versailles – a harsh peace?

The traditional view is that the Treaty of Versailles was a harsh document, motivated, as far as the French were concerned, by a desire for revenge and to ensure Germany could never again threaten French soil. This traditional view is based on the belief that the treaty weakened the German democracy, contributed to Germany's economic hardships and ultimately helped the Nazis to come to power. This argument supports the idea that the treaty that ended World War I helped cause World War II.

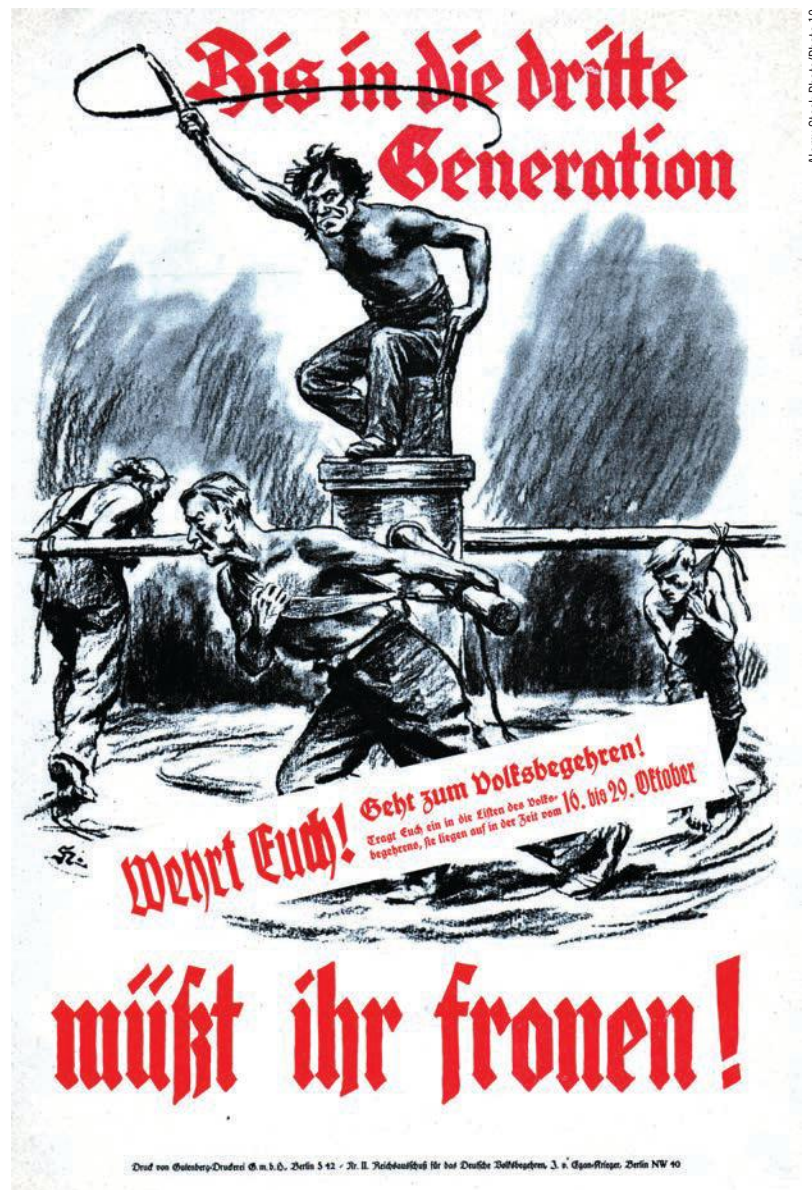
This traditional view gained added acceptance when the eminent British economist John Maynard Keynes, who was part of the British delegation at the conference, published his famous book *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, almost as soon as the conference ended. He called the Treaty of Versailles a 'Carthaginian peace', accused the French leader Georges Clemenceau of seeking 'to crush the economic life of his enemy', and saw the reparations and other economic terms as having been designed to reduce Germany and its people to economic enslavement.

In recent times there have been new arguments from a number of historians who have questioned this traditional view of the Treaty of Versailles, suggesting that the treaty was in fact not that harsh. Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan is part of this new school of historical opinion, as was the late German historian Detlev Peukert. More recently, the German-born Australian historian Jürgen Tampke has added to the debate with his book *A Perfidious Distortion of History* (2017).

The issue of reparations is one area that has come under a closer re-examination, particularly the view that war reparations broke the German economy. Tampke suggests that the economic impact of the reparations has been overstated. 'Germany did not pay much and what it did pay was with borrowed money ... in monetary terms Germany paid about 7 billion in gold marks, 5 million of this was with American loans, so all told they paid about 2 billion marks, less than 1% of their annual budget'.¹⁴ It is an argument that Detlev Peukert had raised earlier in his book *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (1992). While acknowledging that the treaty was not without flaws, he suggested that it was in fact quite reasonable.¹⁵

These historians also dispute any claim that the Treaty of Versailles was responsible for bringing Hitler to power in 1933 and was therefore a cause of World War II. While accepting that the Nazi movement gained propaganda value from attacking the treaty, an often-overlooked fact is that every political grouping was doing the same. Tampke is clear in his view that Hitler's appointment as Chancellor in January 1933 was the result of factors that were operating in Germany from 1929 to 1933 and had nothing to do with the treaty. As far as the outbreak of war was concerned, MacMillan has written that 'Hitler did not wage war because of the Treaty of Versailles, although he found its existence a godsend for his propaganda ... When war came in 1939, it was a result of 20 years of decisions taken or not taken, not of arrangements made in 1919'.¹⁶

Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles Germany lost about 13 per cent of its territory (most of it in eastern Europe), about 12 per cent of its population, and some 48 per cent of its iron ore and 16 per cent of its coal resources. While the German condemnation of the treaty was understandable and genuine, it should nonetheless be placed in perspective. The French had been demanding a more severe settlement, including the loss of the Rhineland and the creation of an independent buffer zone along the Franco–German border. This did not happen. Germany was neither occupied nor divided (as it was after World War II), and the nation remained essentially



This propaganda poster created in 1929 shows the German people reduced to slavery by the demands of the much-hated Treaty of Versailles.

intact. The peace treaty could, in fact, have been much harsher, particularly in light of the very severe Treaty of Brest-Litovsk that Germany had imposed on the defeated Russians in 1918. Under that treaty, Russia had lost 25 per cent of its territory, 40 per cent of its population and more than 70 per cent of its industrial capacity.

Apart from Soviet Russia, Germany was still the largest nation on the continent and still potentially the most powerful, despite the restrictions of the treaty. The war had been fought outside Germany and, unlike France and Belgium, Germany had suffered very little war damage. The German population remained larger than that of its traditional enemy, France, and Germany's industrial capacity, despite the clauses of the treaty, remained strong. Motivated by a strong feeling of national humiliation, the aim of every German government after 1919 was to revise or evade the provisions of the treaty, and in this task the Germans had some success. The economic restrictions held Germany back for a time, but by 1924 the German economy was in recovery and expanding. Even the military clauses of the treaty did not hold Germany back. The army was reduced to 100 000 men, but other military clauses were generally evaded.



Mary Evans Picture Library/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

This surrender of weapons was required as part of the disarmament provisions of the treaty. The German government paid for each weapon handed in.

The effects of the treaty

In Germany, the most important effect of the Treaty of Versailles was that it generated a sense 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 the republic and the democracy, both foreign concepts to the German people, were held responsible.

The Weimar Republic was forever associated with military defeat and international humiliation. Nationalists and the political forces of the extreme left and the extreme right used the treaty in propaganda to persistently and effectively attack the republic and the democracy. Opportunist 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, Germans found it hard to summon any emotional loyalty to a political system that appeared to have failed them. 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 or military recovery. But it did damage Germany's fragile democracy, for it weakened the faith many Germans had in the democratic system.

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'. The immediate effect of the treaty was that Germany experienced serious economic and political instability, but this was restored after 1924 and the Dawes Plan (1924) marked the start of an era of economic stability, albeit based on the unsteady foundation of large-scale foreign loans.

Another long-term effect of the Treaty of Versailles was that it failed to solve the problem of Germany. The Allies could either try to cultivate Germany as a potential partner by giving the 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 a settlement that the Germans would certainly seek to overturn, and it did little to diminish their capacity to do so by force in the near future.



BRITISH ECONOMIST JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES ON THE ECONOMIC UNREALITY OF THE PEACE TREATY, 1920

Their [the peacemakers'] pre-occupations, good and bad alike, related to frontiers and nationalities, to the balance of power, to the future weakening of a strong and dangerous enemy, to revenge, and to the shifting by the victors of their unbearable financial burdens onto the shoulders of the defeated ...

The Treaty includes no provisions for the economic rehabilitation of Europe—nothing to make the defeated central empires into good neighbours, nothing to stabilise the new states of Europe, nothing to reclaim Russia ...

The policy of reducing Germany to servitude for a generation, of degrading the lives of millions of human beings, and of depriving a whole nation of happiness should be abhorrent and detestable... nations are not authorised to visit on the children of their enemies the misdoings of parents.

John Maynard Keynes, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, Macmillan, London, 1920, pp. 51, 174, 211.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What, according to Keynes, were the main aims of the peacemakers?
- 2 What are the major criticisms Keynes makes of the Treaty of Versailles?
- 3 Are there any similarities between the attitude Keynes has towards defeated Germany and the attitude of Harold Nicolson in the source study on page 40?
- 4 Explain what Keynes meant by the remark that 'nations are not authorised to visit on the children of their enemies the misdoings of parents'.
- 5 What do you think was Keynes' motive for writing this source?

2.3 SUMMARY

THE IMPACT OF THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

- ◆ The Germans were not allowed to participate in the peace conference and were presented with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in May 1919.
- ◆ Despite protest, the German government agreed to sign the treaty on 28 June 1919.
- ◆ Hatred of the treaty cut across all classes in Germany. It was called a *diktat*, or imposed peace.
- ◆ The treaty created a legacy of long-term bitterness in German society, and every German government after 1919 sought to evade or reverse the terms of the treaty.
- ◆ The Weimar Republic and the democracy were both weakened because they were always associated with the Treaty of Versailles. This was a constant theme emphasised by those who opposed the republic and the democratic system.
- ◆ The economic provisions of the treaty weakened Germany's ability to restore its economy, although a measure of economic recovery returned from 1924.
- ◆ In the years immediately after the war British economist JM Keynes criticised the economic unreality of the treaty, including the heavy reparation burden it placed on the German people.

2.3 QUESTIONS

- 1 Describe the main territorial changes that affected Germany in the Treaty of Versailles.
- 2 In small groups, discuss each of the following and report your conclusions back to the class.
 - i Was the Treaty of Versailles fair?
 - ii Were the territorial changes made to Germany justified?
 - iii Were the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles reasonable?
 - iv Was it reasonable that Germany would pay for the cost of the war?
 - v Was it reasonable that Germany should carry the sole responsibility for causing the war?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Why did Germans regard the Treaty of Versailles as unjust? What were some of the consequences of this belief?
 - 2 To what degree could it be argued that the main threats to the Weimar Republic before 1924 were those from both the extreme left and the extreme right?
-

Endnotes

- 1 John Wheeler-Bennett, 'Ludendorff the Soldier and Politician', *Virginia Quarterly*, Spring, 1938, p. 187.
- 2 Quoted in John Terraine, *To Win a War: 1918, the Year of Victory*, Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1978, p. 252.
- 3 Quoted in Max von Baden, *The Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden*, Constable and Co Limited, New York, 1928, p. 163.
- 4 Quoted in James Joll, *Europe since 1870*, Penguin Books, England, 1976, p. 37.
- 5 Philipp Scheidemann, *Memoiren eines Sozialdemokrat*, Reissner, Dresden, 1928, p. 310.
- 6 Matthias Erzberger, *Erlebnisse im Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart, 1920, p. 327.
- 7 Quoted in Max von Baden, *The Memoirs of Prince Max of Baden*, p. 312.
- 8 *Vorwärts*, 22 November 1918.
- 9 Diary of Wilhelm Groener, quoted in Golo Mann, *A History of Germany since 1789*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1968, p. 331.
- 10 Gustav Noske, *Von Kiel bis Kapp*, Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, Berlin, 1920, p. 68.
- 11 Quoted in Richard Watt, *The Kings Depart*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1968, p. 401.
- 12 Philipp Scheidemann, *The Making of a New Germany*, Freeport, New York, p. 310.
- 13 Quoted in John Wheeler-Bennett, *Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics 1918–1945*, Macmillan, London, 1961, p. 52.
- 14 Radio National ABC, 9 January 2017.
- 15 Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Hill & Wang, New York, 1992 p. 278.
- 16 Margaret MacMillan, *Peacemakers: Six Months that Changed the World*, John Murray, London, 2001, pp. 499–500.

GERMANY 1914–1919: WAR AND DEFEAT

- Place the following events in chronological order:
Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles.
The Spartacist uprising
Germany declares a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare.
Germany activates the Schlieffen Plan and attacks Belgium.
The armistice is signed.
Germany becomes a republic.
Friedrich Ebert becomes German chancellor.
- Explain why many Germans were shocked by the signing of an armistice in November 1918.
- Assess the impact of the Allied Blockade of Germany. In your answer consider its role in the outcome of World War I, the unrest in Germany in 1918–1919, and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919.
- Outline the causes of the German Revolution and evaluate whether it achieved its aims.
- Draw and fill out a table like the one below. Assess the motivations of as many groups as you can.

Groups who support the new Republic	Reasons why they support the new Republic	Groups who oppose the new Republic	Reasons why they oppose the new Republic

- How and why did 'the right' undermine the new republic in the period after the signing of the Treaty of Versailles?
- Explain how and why Germany in November 1918 was different from Germany in November 1919.
- Use a mind map or other graphic organiser to show the causes of instability in Germany in this period and how the instability affected different groups.
- Prepare a two-minute speech for or against the topic 'The Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germany.'
- Essay question: Assess the impact of the Treaty of Versailles on Germany 1918–1919.



The painting *Weimar Carnival*
by Horst Naumann, 1928/29

The Weimar Republic 1919–1929

CHAPTER 3

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: THE YEARS OF CHALLENGE 1919–1923

CHAPTER 4

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: THE GOOD YEARS 1924–1929

CHAPTER 3

The Weimar Republic: The years of challenge 1919–1923

3.1

CREATING A GERMAN
DEMOCRACY

3.2

DEMOCRACY UNDER CHALLENGE:
GERMANY 1919–1923

3.3

1923: A DIFFICULT YEAR

A woman using German banknotes to light a fire in 1923, during the height of the hyperinflation when the German currency became worthless



Bridgeman Images/Universal History Archive/UG

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KEY WORDS AND TERMS

coalition government

Formed when two or more political parties combine to gain sufficient numbers to form a government.

constitution

The document that defines the rules by which a country is governed.

Enabling Act

An Act that gave the German government special powers under the constitution to deal with emergency situations.

hyperinflation

Extreme or rapid inflation, which devastated the German economy in the early 1920s and came to a head in November 1923.

inflation

An economic situation in which, over time, there is an increase in prices and a decrease in purchasing power.

judiciary

The legal system of a country.

Junkers

The landowning aristocracy, based mainly on the large estates of eastern Prussia.

liberalism

The belief in freedom, in particular, the freedom of the individual within the nation-state. It includes freedom of ideas as well as freedom of political and religious expression.

passive resistance

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

policy of fulfilment

The name given to the Weimar government policy of the early 1920s to meet (or fulfil) the terms of the Treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany by the Allies.

proportional representation

A system of voting used in the Weimar Republic that allocated seats in the Reichstag in proportion to the total number of votes cast for a particular party.

putsch

A German word for an uprising or revolt, usually associated with an attempt to overthrow the government.

Reichsbank

The German central bank.

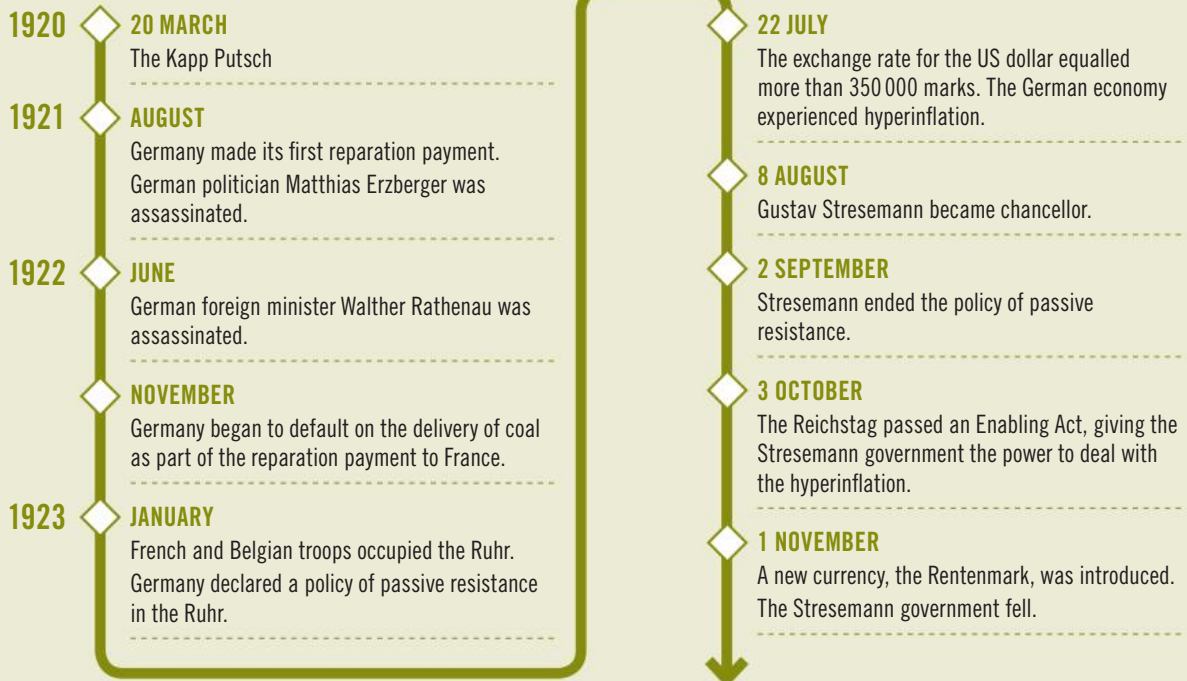
Reichswehr

German armed forces of the Weimar era.

Weimar Republic

The name given to the period from 1919 to 1933 when Germany was a democracy. The first German parliament had met at Weimar in 1919.

The years of challenge 1919–1923



TIMELINE

3.1

CREATING A GERMAN DEMOCRACY

It is no surprise that in the slogan of the French Revolution, *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* (Liberty, Equality, Fraternity), 'liberty' came first. Both the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century were about freedom and individual rights, movements that gave birth to the concept of **liberalism**, the philosophy of freedom. The great mission of liberalism was to create a society where people could be free of fear, where property and fundamental rights were protected and where beliefs and opinions could be freely expressed. By extension, in a liberal democracy the people governed themselves, and a democratic **constitution** protected the right to vote in free and democratic elections to select and to change their government.

In 1848 there were liberal uprisings in much of Europe, including most of the German states. The uprisings, many of them student and middle class inspired, demanded liberal and democratic reform. But as suddenly as they started, the revolutions quickly failed, for the forces of repression were stronger. The failure of the 1848 revolutions in the Germanic states meant that Germany never had a liberal revolution of the type that created strong democracies in Britain, the United States and ultimately France. In the new united Germany after 1871, liberal sentiment existed and many liberal institutions emerged, the capitalist system was on private property and free enterprise was consolidated, as was the role of law, but the autocratic, conservative forces that ran the German state were always stronger. Liberalism in Germany, as one historian observed, was a 'plant of stunted growth'.

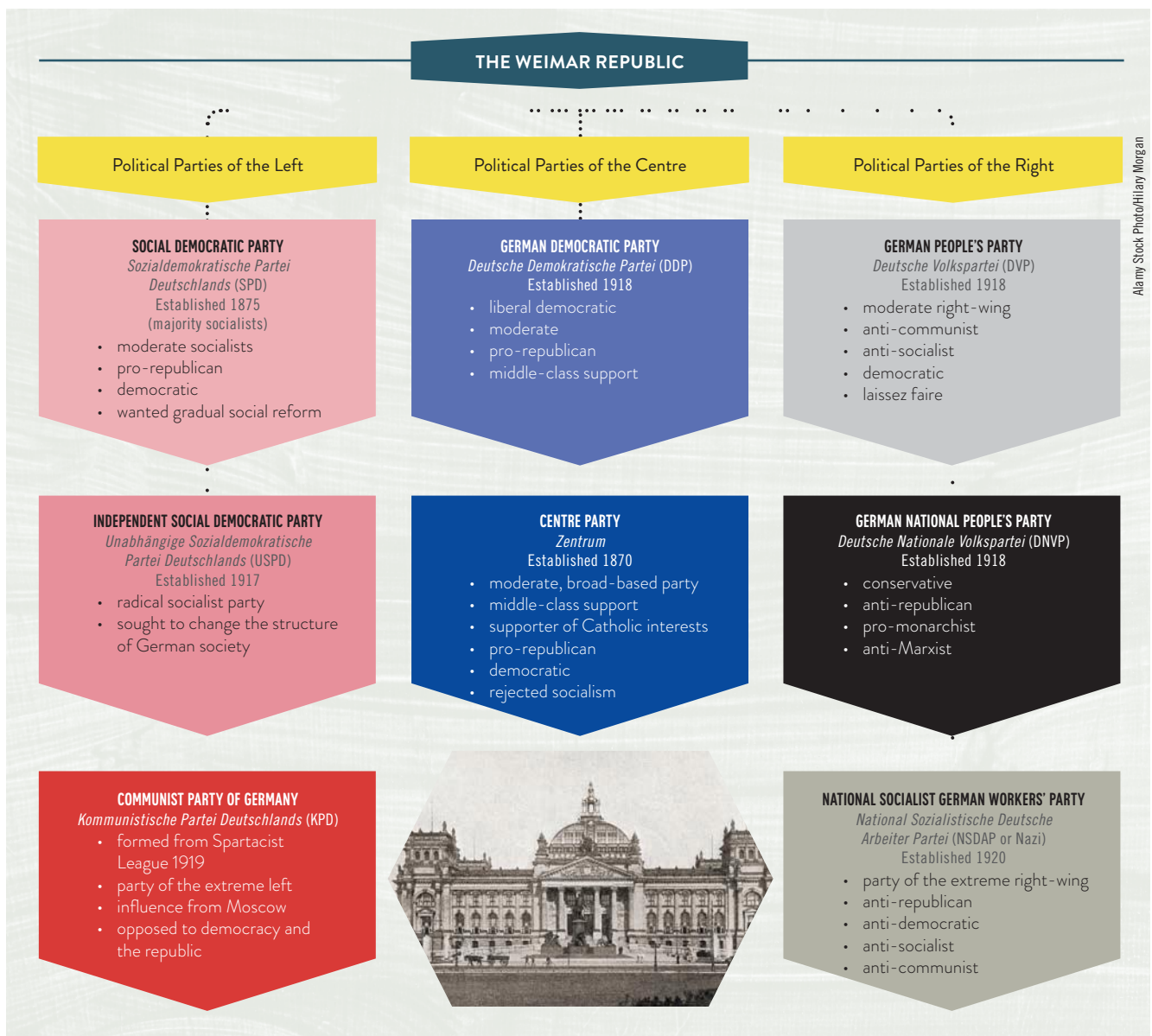
Germany as a nation never had a democratic tradition, and for many Germans, so used to a long-standing authoritarian tradition, true democracy with full freedoms for all people was both a new and foreign concept. In 1919 a democratic system came to Germany suddenly and unexpectedly. The system faced great challenges, and 12 years later it collapsed and was replaced by a brutal totalitarian state. It was never inevitable that this bold democratic experiment in Germany would fail, but that failure changed world history dramatically.

German political parties

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 these terms began during the French Revolution, when political groups who wanted more extreme or radical change sat on the left of the political assembly, and more moderate or conservative groups sat on the right. To be defined as a party of the right suggests more conservative 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, are seen as radical and extreme.

In Germany's case, the more moderate parties of the left and the right tended to support the new democracy, while the two parties at the extremes – the communists on the extreme left and the Nazis on the extreme right – wanted to overthrow the democracy.

Within German society certain classes tended to support certain parties. As a broad rule, the working class supported the parties of the left, whereas many middle-class Germans and rural people supported right-wing political groups. In Germany after 1918 there existed many political parties or groups, and in the 1920s new political parties such as the Nazi Party emerged.



Major political parties of the Weimar Republic

Parties of the left

Of the parties of the left, the largest group in Germany remained the Social Democratic Party, *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD). The SPD supported the cause of the German working class and the demand for increased political democracy in the state. When the war ended in 1918 the SPD had become a very moderate party of the left. As the largest political group in the Reichstag, it was handed power, and set out to establish the new German democracy.

The SPD had supported Germany's war effort, and as the war entered its third year the left-wing or more extreme groups within the SPD increasingly challenged the party's continued support for the war. They wanted an end to the war, and in April 1917 they split from the SPD to form the Independent Social Democratic Party, *Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (USPD). This group represented a more radical party of the left. The party ceased to exist in 1922.



Political parties of the Weimar Republic



On the far left of the political spectrum was the German Communist Party, *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD), formed in 1919. What remained of the Spartacists, together with followers of the failed USPD, later supported the KPD. While relatively small in the 1920s, it progressively grew in strength.

Parties of the right

Before the German Revolution of 1918 the most powerful groups in German society were the conservative governing classes. This group included the industrialists, the **Junker** landowning aristocracy, the conservative civil service, the Army High Command, and increasing numbers of the German middle class. These conservative classes had been the power in the old Germany, and the collapse of 1918 had left them with no alternative other than to accept the November revolution. For the sake of stability and order they were prepared to tolerate the new socialist government of Friedrich Ebert.

On the right wing of German politics were the German National People's Party, *Deutsche Nationale Volkspartei* (DNVP), and the German People's Party, *Deutsche Volkspartei* (DVP). The DNVP was the party of the real conservatives and the industrialists. It still supported the monarchy and had no liking for the new republic. The DVP represented more moderate right-wing opinion.



Parties of the centre

The German middle class, like the old conservative classes, also feared disorder and the influence of the left. The parties of the middle in German politics were represented by the new German Democratic Party, *Deutsche Demokratische Partei* (DDP). The DDP was committed to democratic reform. Its members were cautious of the parties of the left and the right.

There was also the Centre Party, *Zentrum*, a moderate party with broad middle-class backing that supported the republic and the democracy. In particular, and most importantly, it also defended the interests of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany. The Centre Party was strongest in southern Germany, which had a large Catholic population.

The first clue to Germany's political instability can be found in the fact that this was a nation with many political parties, and no one party ever had enough seats in the Reichstag to govern alone. In the 14 years between 1919 and the rise of Hitler in 1933, Germany had 21 changes of government, every one of them a **coalition government**.



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 Germany at the time, elections were held on 19 January 1919, and all Germans over the age of 20 had the right to vote. This included all women, making Germany one of only a few nations at the time that supported female suffrage.

The election returned a clear vote of support for both a democracy and a republic. Of the 423 seats in the new Reichstag, the parties of moderation were the winners, the 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 both the republic and the democracy.

THE ELECTIONS OF JANUARY 1919



ullstein bild - Archiv/Gerstenberg

A political poster produced for the January 1919 German elections with the call 'Workers open your eyes! Vote SPD'. The poster shows a blindfolded worker surrounded by political key words: Moscow, Dictatorship, Red Army, Forced Work, Potsdam, Monarchy, Drill, 12 hour work.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Which political party is represented in this poster?
- 2 Is the party left or right wing? Radical or moderate?
- 3 Would the party be supportive of or opposed to the words that form the backdrop to the image?
- 4 Who is the target audience for the poster?
- 5 What other event in Germany in January 1919 helps to explain the words 'Moscow', 'Dictatorship', 'Red Army' and 'Forced Work' on the poster?
- 6 Why do you think they have referenced this event?
- 7 How can propaganda posters be useful to historians? What are some of their limitations?
- 8 Research: Find other political posters from this era. What are the similarities and differences between them?

The National Assembly at Weimar

The first meeting of the new German parliament took place on 6 February 1919 in the quiet town of Weimar, well away from the strife in Berlin some 200 kilometres to the north. In the eighteenth century Weimar had been the home of the great German writers Goethe and Schiller, and was a major centre of German culture. In the twentieth century, Weimar gave its name to this new experiment in German democracy – the **Weimar Republic**.

After the opening ceremony, Friedrich Ebert, who had held power since November, handed power back to the newly elected parliament. A few days later the parliament in turn elected him the first president of the new German Republic. President Ebert then appointed the new government,

a coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Centre Party and the German Democratic Party (DDP). Philipp Scheidemann, the new leader of the Social Democratic Party, became the first chancellor, and his coalition held 329 of the 423 seats in the National Assembly. This set the political framework, for every government of the republic was a coalition government.

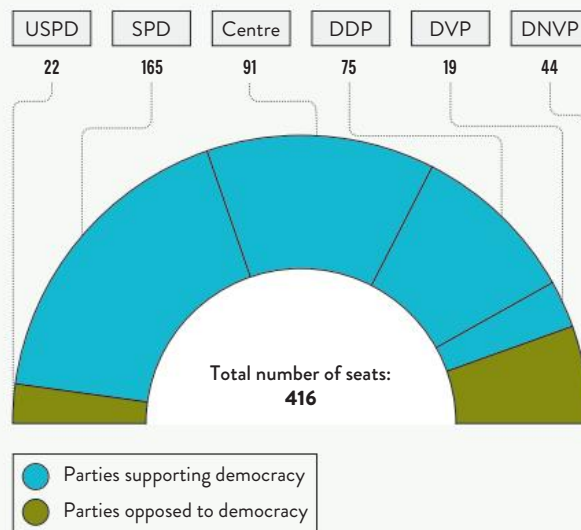
THE ELECTION OF 1919

SOURCE A: From Friedrich Ebert's address to the new German parliament, 6 February 1919

The Reich Government, through me, welcomes the assembly of the German nation. I have an especially cordial greeting for the ladies, who for the first time take their place as equals in the German Parliament ... the government welcomes the National Assembly as the highest and sole authority in Germany. Gone for ever are the old kings and princes by the Grace of God ... The German people is free, will remain free, and will in future rule itself ... thus we go to our task, our great aim set firmly before us, to preserve the rights of the German people and to build up a strong democracy in Germany.

J & K Hohlfeld (eds), *Dokumente der Deutschen Politik und Geschichte*, vol. 3, p. 14.

SOURCE B: The results of the 1919 Reichstag elections



QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain Ebert's reference to 'the ladies' in Source A.
- 2 According to Ebert, what were the most important aims of the new elected parliament?
- 3 With reference to Source B, which three political parties formed the first coalition government of the new republic?
- 4 Based on the evidence in Source B, the new government coalition had a majority in the Reichstag of

A fewer than 50 seats.	C more than 100 seats.
B fewer than 100 seats.	D more than 150 seats.
- 5 Evaluate the usefulness of Sources A and B for a historian studying the early Weimar Republic period. In your answer you should consider the nature of the sources, and what a historian could infer from them.

The German constitution

A major task of the new assembly was to approve the new German constitution. The difficult process of drafting a new republican constitution had been entrusted to Hugo Preuss, a lawyer and a leading figure in the German Democratic Party. After much debate the new constitution was approved in July 1919. The constitution of the Weimar Republic was one of the most democratic documents of its time. From a state that had little democratic freedom in 1918, Germany in 1919 became one of the most democratic states in the world.

Basic freedoms guaranteed

A series of clauses guaranteed the basic rights of the German people. All Germans were to be equal before the law, and personal liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of religion were all written into the constitution. Private property was guaranteed, and Germans had the right to form trade unions. Within a year Germany went from being a state under an autocratic ruler to becoming one of the most democratic and free societies on Earth.

The Reichstag

The constitution provided for two houses of parliament. The 17 German states, or *Länder*, as they were now called, survived and were represented in the Reichsrat, a body that had very limited powers. Effective power resided in the Reichstag, the lower house, which represented the German people. Members of the Reichstag were to be elected every four years by all Germans over the age of 20, and the chancellor and the ministers, appointed by the president, were responsible to the Reichstag. Legislation had to be passed in the Reichstag before it became law.

The powers of the president

Under the constitution Germany was to have a president who would be elected by all Germans every seven years. The president was head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces. Under the new German constitution, the president was not a figurehead but had very real powers. As there had once been a powerful Kaiser, it was thought that the new republic needed a powerful president to balance the elected parliament; indeed, many Germans saw the president as an *ersatz Kaiser* (a substitute Kaiser).

The president was directly elected by the people, which also made him a potentially strong political figure. He had 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 use 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 gave the president, in a time of emergency, the power to suspend the constitution, and to issue laws by decree regardless of the elected parliament.

THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION



The Weimar Constitution

Article 48 In the event that public order and security are seriously disturbed or endangered, the Reich President may take the measures necessary for their restoration, intervening, if necessary, with the aid of the armed forces. For this he may temporarily abrogate [cancel], wholly or in part, the fundamental principles laid down in articles 114, 115, 117, 118, 123, 124 and 153.

Article 114 Personal liberty is inviolable ...

Article 115 The house of every German is his sanctuary and is inviolable. Exceptions are permitted only by authority of law.

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, in 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 the purposes not contrary to the criminal law ...

Article 135 All inhabitants of the Reich enjoy full religious freedom and freedom of conscience. The free exercise of religion is guaranteed by the constitution and is under public protection.

Article 142 Art, science and the teaching thereof are free ...

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

QUESTIONS

- 1 Prepare a list of the basic freedoms you would expect in a true democratic system. Identify which clauses of the Weimar Constitution established these freedoms for the German people in 1919.
- 2 In your own words, summarise the powers given to the President in Article 48.
- 3 Which of the following statements can be supported by your understanding of Article 48?
 - A The use of Article 48 could deprive the German people of their basic freedoms.
 - B The President needed the approval of the Reichstag to use Article 48.
 - C The President could only use Article 48 'with the aid of the armed forces'.
 - D The Reichstag had the authority to overrule the President.
- 4 What are the benefits of giving the President such power? What would be the dangers?
- 5 Which of the following statements can be supported by the evidence in the source?
 - A The freedoms of the German people could be abolished using the constitution.
 - B The freedoms of the German people could be abolished only by abolishing the constitution.
- 6 Which groups are likely to support these reforms? Which groups are likely to oppose them? Why?

The voting system

Under the new constitution, members of the Reichstag were elected by a system of **proportional representation**. Under this system votes were cast for the party rather than for the individual candidate, and by using a quota system every 60 000 votes for that party usually guaranteed one member to the Reichstag. This system made it possible for small parties to pick up enough votes to get some of their members into the parliament. Some historians have argued that this added to the instability of the political system. However, the voting system, still used in many European nations today, was seen as the most democratic.

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

- The Chancellor leads the party or coalition of parties that controlled a majority of the seats in the Reichstag
- The Chancellor is head of the government and responsible for the day-to-day governing of the country
- Normally the Chancellor appoints the Cabinet of Ministers
- The Chancellor and Cabinet initiate 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 represents the 18 German states



Alamy Stock Photo/Hilary Morgan; Alamy Stock Photo/interfoto/Austrian National Library

The Weimar political system

OPINION ON THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION

SOURCE A: From the lawyer Hugo Preuss, who drafted the Weimar Constitution in 1919

One finds suspicion everywhere. Germans cannot shake off their old political timidity and their deference to the authoritarian state.

Hugo Preuss, cited in Mark Hewitson, *National Identity and Political Thought in Germany: Wilhelmine Depictions of the French Third Republic, 1890–1914* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2000, p. 251.

SOURCE B: From the historian Klaus Fisher

It was one of the most democratic documents in the world ... however it was doubtful whether such a democratic constitution could work in the hands of a people that was neither psychologically or historically prepared for self-government.

Klaus Fisher, *Nazi Germany: A New History*, Aardvark Books, 1995, p. 59.

SOURCE C: From the historian Otto Friedrich

What Preuss drafted was essentially a sound and democratic constitution ... the troubles that were to come stemmed not from the constitution but from the society that the Constitution was supposed to

represent. It was a society fiercely divided against itself, divided not only between extremes of radical and conservative ideology but by the psychological and economic consequences of military defeat, the crisis of reparations, inflation, foreign invasion and intellectual demoralisation ... The constitution drafted at Weimar began and would end as a document in search of a people.

Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge*, Harper Row, New York, 1972, p. 49.

SOURCE D: From the historian Detlev Peukert

Despite its imperfections, the Weimar Reich constitution provided an open framework for an experiment in democracy which would have been quite capable of further refinement under more favourable circumstances.

Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, Allen Lane, 1991, p. 50.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify the main point being made in Source A by Hugo Preuss, the lawyer who drafted the constitution.
- 2 Do you think Fischer, the author of Source B, would agree with Source A's claim? Use evidence from Source B to support your answer.
- 3 What do you think is the main point of Source C?
- 4 In Source D the historian Detlev Peukert suggests the constitution had 'imperfections'. What would he consider to be its imperfections?
- 5 Using the information in Sources A–D, summarise the problems associated with implementing the new constitution.

3.1 SUMMARY

THE GERMAN DEMOCRACY

- ◆ Germany became a democracy at the end of World War I, and elections for the new German parliament were held in January 1919.
- ◆ The new constitution made Germany one of the most democratic nations in the world, but democracy was a foreign concept to many Germans, who had been used to authoritarian rule in the past.
- ◆ Friedrich Ebert, the former chancellor, became the first German president, and Article 48 of the new German constitution gave the president significant powers.
- ◆ The Germans used proportional representation as their system of voting, which allowed even small parties to gain seats in the German parliament.

3.1 QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the meaning of the terms 'left wing' and 'right wing' in the political context.
- 2 Draw a line and mark these three positions on it: extreme left, centre and extreme right. Place each of the following German political parties at the point on the line that you feel best reflects their political position in Weimar Germany.

SPD

KPD

DNVP

NSDAP

Zentrum

DVP

DDP



- 3 Prepare a two-column list with the headings 'Strengths of the Weimar Constitution' and 'Weaknesses of the Weimar Constitution'. In the appropriate columns, list what you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the constitution. For each, briefly explain why you consider it to be a strength or a weakness.
- 4 Consider the following statements describing how the system of government worked, and fill in the missing words or phrases.
 - i The German Head of State was the, elected by the German people every years.
 - ii The head of the government was the, who controlled a majority of seats in the
 - iii The head of the government was appointed by the
 - iv Laws were passed in the and were signed into law by the
 - v The name for the ministers who made up a government was the
- 5 Outline the special powers given to the German President under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution.
- 6 How was the Weimar Republic different from Imperial Germany? In your answer consider the groups that lost or gained power and influence, the nature of the constitution, and the nature and purpose of the Reichstag.

3.2

DEMOCRACY UNDER CHALLENGE: GERMANY 1919–1923

Between 1919 and 1923 the Weimar Republic endured years of instability. Although a new government had been democratically elected, there were challenges to both its authority and legitimacy. All levels of German society had been impacted by the defeat of 1918, and major social and economic upheavals followed that further weakened the authority of the state. Many Germans saw the Treaty of Versailles as the major cause for all these troubles after 1919. Many saw this as a treaty of punishment rather than a treaty of peace, and the onset of economic and social disorders in Germany were seen as a direct consequence of the all-powerful victors extracting vengeance on the vanquished.

The threat from the right

The German army had supported the Weimar government when it was threatened by the radicalism of the extreme left with the Spartacist uprising in 1919. The following year the government faced another challenge to its authority, but this time it came from the extreme right.

Right-wing elements in German society, in particular nationalist groups, industrialists, the military and the old ruling classes of pre-war Germany, had never accepted the republic. It was associated with Germany's military defeat, with the humiliation of the peace treaty and with political and social disorder and economic hardship.

In 1920 extreme right-wing elements tried to overthrow the elected government in what became known as the Kapp **Putsch**. The immediate cause of the Kapp Putsch was the much-hated Treaty of Versailles, as the government attempted to carry out the military clauses of treaty. These military clauses had caused deep resentment, as the army (or **Reichswehr**, as it was now called) had been reduced to 100 000 men. This also meant reducing the Freikorps, which had helped the government put down the threat from the Spartacists in 1919.



Part of the armed Ehrhardt Brigade that entered Berlin at the time of the Kapp Putsch in March 1920. This gun battery was established on Unter den Linden, one of the main avenues of Berlin.

In March 1920, when the government ordered the dissolution of the Ehrhardt Freikorps Brigade stationed outside Berlin, the military commander of the city, General von Luttwitz, refused to obey. Von Luttwitz, who had formed a conspiracy with other right-wing officers and civilians, ordered two Freikorps brigades of about 12 000 men to march on the city.

Chancellor Bauer and President Ebert expected that the army would protect the government from this challenge from the right, just as they had protected the government from the earlier challenges from the Spartacists, but the leader of the army, General von Seeckt, refused to allow the army to intervene. These were men (army and Freikorps) who only a few years earlier had been fighting together on the Western Front. 'When Reichswehr fires on Reichswehr,' von Seeckt told the Defence

Minister, 'then all comradeship within the officer corps will have vanished.'¹ Von Seeckt and most of the officer corps sympathised with the rebels. With the army unwilling to protect the government, President Ebert, Chancellor Bauer and the Cabinet were forced to leave Berlin as rebels occupied key government buildings in the capital. The military leaders of the putsch declared a new government, to be 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, workers and trade unions declared a general strike in support of the government. The strike 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 Luttwitz and Kapp fled the city and the legal government returned.



Kapp Putsch

THE KAPP PUTSCH

SOURCE A: A government poster at the time of the Kapp Putsch

Workers! The military putsch has started ... the achievements of the past year are to be smashed, your dearly fought freedoms to be destroyed. Everything is at stake! The strongest counter measures are required ... therefore down tools, come out on strike. Fight with all means for the Republic. Put all quarrels aside!

SOURCE B: An account of the Kapp Putsch, 1920

Ehrhardt's men entered Berlin virtually unopposed ... As the men moved towards the Brandenburg Gate they were greeted by Kapp and by General Ludendorff in civilian dress, who just happened to be out for a walk at a quarter to seven on a spring morning. Fifteen minutes later they marched through the gate and



down the Wilhelmstresse (the street which had the main government offices including the Chancellery). They quickly deployed, occupying government buildings and key points with considerable efficiency ...

The Ebert regime however had prudently left for Stuttgart by car but unfortunately they ran out of fuel and were forced to switch to a train. There were frequent document checks. One official asked to see Ebert's papers and read 'Friedrich Ebert, Reich President'. He handed them back without looking up. While they waited they had coffee in the station restaurant. Chancellor Bauer was worried about a suitcase sent on in advance because he needed a clean collar size 44.

The image of the first democratic government of Germany huddled together on a station platform worrying about luggage, passing unnoticed, unacclaimed, having travelled incognito across the breadth of Germany ... On the train ride back to Berlin after the fall of Kapp, most of the government got very drunk and ended up vomiting in one another's compartments.

Alex De Jong, *The Weimar Chronicle*, Paddington Press, New York, 1978, p. 66.

QUESTIONS

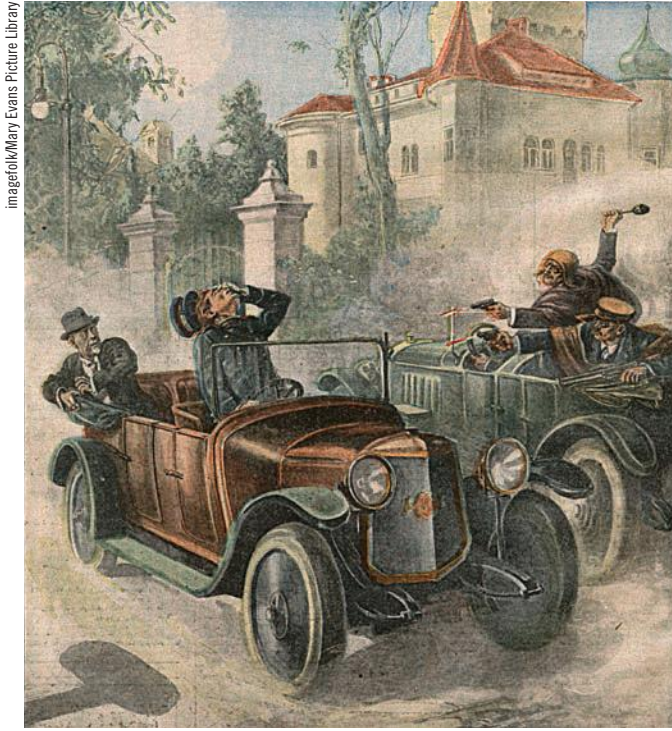
- 1 Explain why, in Source A, the government would appeal to the working class for support against the Kapp Putsch?
- 2 Explain the reference in Source A to the 'freedoms' the German people enjoyed in 1920 that they had not enjoyed in the days before the Republic.
- 3 Who was General Ludendorff, mentioned in Source B? Explain why he would express sympathy for the Kapp Putsch.
- 4 Evaluate what Source B reveals about:
 - i the role of the military in the Weimar Republic
 - ii the effective strength of the elected Weimar government in 1920.

The 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 left wing of German politics, and in particular the German workers, saw the real threat to the political system as coming from the extreme right.
- ◆ The Kapp Putsch also revealed the power of the German army within the state, and the sympathy of the army leadership for the right wing of German politics. The army had been prepared to protect the state from threats from the left, but it could not be relied on to neutralise threats from the right. In 1933 it was an extreme right-wing movement (the Nazis) that finally overthrew the democratic system.

The army was becoming, in fact, a state within a state, prepared to follow its own policy regardless of the elected government. Essentially conservative and right wing, with little faith in the idea of democracy, the army was becoming a force that no German government could afford to ignore. Although Kapp had fled to Sweden and died there in 1922, the other conspirators were treated leniently. No action was taken against General von Seeckt, the head of the German army, who had refused to support the government.



An illustration from the Italian magazine *Illustrazione del Popolo*, 9 July 1922, depicting the assassination of Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau by right-wing gunmen in 1922

Political assassinations: 'The enemy stands on the Right'

After 1920, most of the opposition to the new republic came not from the extreme left but from the extreme right. The right wing of German politics encompassed many groups:

- ◆ There was 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 – industrialists, the civil service, the **judiciary**, the educational system and the church, 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 humiliation of 1918.
- ◆ There were nationalists of all persuasions who looked for a restoration of German honour and power and an end to the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles.

Violence against the republic by the communists and Spartacists in 1919 had been called the Red Terror, and this new wave of violence in the 1920s, led by nationalist right-wing extremists, became known as the White Terror. Despite the fact that the Freikorps had been officially disbanded, many paramilitary groups still existed, and the more extreme were prepared to use violence against those they believed to be the enemies of Germany. Between 1919 and 1922 there were more than 370 political murders, most of them committed by the extreme right.

In August 1921 two ex-officers of the Ehrhardt Freikorps Brigade, which had failed in the Kapp Putsch, shot dead Matthias Erzberger while he was holidaying in the Black Forest. He was a prime target for the extreme right, one of the so-called 'November criminals' who had signed the Treaty of Versailles two years earlier. 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 as he was being driven to work. 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 policy that Germany should seek to meet (fulfil) the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. A few months before his death, he had also negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet Union. Both Germany and the Soviet Union had been outcasts in the European community and the treaty was a major step towards resolving the differences between the two countries. The extreme right wing saw a treaty with the communist government in the Soviet Union as an outrage and a betrayal.



President Ebert speaking at Walther Rathenau's funeral in the Reichstag in June 1922



Walther Rathenau

The level of shock and anger at 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.'² However, 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.

The German army in the Weimar Republic

The German army had always been a powerful force in German life and this did not change when Germany became a republic. The army leadership, including the influential officer corps, were on the right of German politics. They had supported the old order during the time of the Kaiser, and now amid the chaos of 1918–1919 they supported the new republic as it sought to establish order and authority. In effect, the army tolerated the new democracy. While they had no real loyalty to the new system, they feared instability and disorder, and particularly the threat from the extreme left.

In 1918, when the Army High Command realised that the war was lost, they supported the change of government from Imperial Germany to Republican Germany, and skilfully allowed the civilian politicians to take the blame for the defeat and the subsequent humiliation of the peace. The army leadership's priority after the war was to preserve the army as a force in a divided and defeated society. Their loyalty was to a Germany that no longer existed. At best they tolerated the new Weimar Republic, if only because the alternative in 1918 was anarchy.

Hans von Seeckt and the German army

The commander of the German army from 1920 to 1926 was General Hans von Seeckt. Like others of his class and background, von Seeckt had little faith in the republic and believed that the army's loyalty was to the nation. Von Seeckt was determined to preserve the position of the army, but he was realistic enough to know that to achieve its goals the army leadership had to work with the government. The army was prepared to support the government and its policy of fulfilment, and by the late 1920s the higher levels of the army leadership had an increasing influence in the government. This was particularly the case when the former Field Marshal, Paul von Hindenburg, became the president of Germany in 1925.



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-2005-0163/Oscar Teigelman

General Hans von Seeckt (1866–1936) with officers of the German army in 1923. Seeckt carried through important reforms in the German army during the 1920s.

Von Seeckt was also determined to overcome the restrictions that the Treaty of Versailles had imposed on the army. In the longer term, he sought the restoration of German military power and an army capable of restoring German honour and greatness.

With great skill and determination, von Seeckt set the basis for the new German army.

- ◆ Despite the provision in the treaty that the General Staff be abolished, he retained it by preserving its function under the name of the Troop Office (*Truppenamt*), a section within the Defence Ministry.
- ◆ The treaty had restricted the number of German officers to 4000, but von Seeckt was able to significantly increase that number by giving many officers civilian titles and placing them within government agencies.
- ◆ Many soldiers retained their role by joining state police forces, with the Prussian state police in the 1920s numbering over 85 000 men.
- ◆ Von Seeckt even used the reduced size of the German army to his advantage: the army became far more selective and rigorous in its recruitment. Von Seeckt set out to create an army of leaders, with ability being the criterion for promotion. Every soldier was trained to do the duty of the rank above him, which allowed for a rapid expansion of the army when the time came.
- ◆ After 1922, when Germany signed the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet Union and re-established relations with its old foe, von Seeckt set up a branch within the army, Special Group Russia (*Sondergruppe R*), to begin military cooperation with the Soviet Union. They negotiated the establishment of military training facilities on Soviet soil for German officers and men. Pilots were trained for the new German air force within Germany and at Lipetsk, an air base south of Moscow.
- ◆ A loophole in the Treaty of Versailles allowed German industrial companies like Krupp to open factories outside Germany. Plants were opened in the Soviet Union and in Sweden, where armaments were produced, and in Holland Krupp opened the Engineering Office for Shipbuilding, a company that focused on submarine development.



Hans von Seeckt

GENERAL VON SEECKT ON THE ROLE OF THE GERMAN ARMY

SOURCE STUDY

With all our strength we must keep political activity of any type out of the Army. Political battles within the Army are not compatible with either the spirit of camaraderie [friendliness among soldiers] or with discipline and can only harm military training. We do not enquire about anyone's political view but of each person who still serves in the Army I must assume that he takes his oath seriously and that of his own free will and as an honest soldier he stands by the Constitution of the Reich ... It cannot be expected that everyone greets in his heart the changes of the times. But each one of us must be imbued with the inner conviction that only when the soldier is true to his constitutional obligations will things begin to improve ...

George Soldan, *Zeitgeschichte in Wort und Bild*, Munich, 1931, vol. 1, p. 444.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain how General von Seeckt saw the role of the German army in the Weimar Republic.
- 2 Explain what he meant by the remark, 'It cannot be expected that everyone greets in his heart the changes of the times.'

THE THREAT FROM THE RIGHT

- ◆ The Weimar Republic, having survived a major threat from the left with the Spartacists, also faced a real threat from right-wing elements in German society after 1919.
- ◆ At best the German army tolerated the new Weimar Republic. They feared disorder and the threat from the extreme left, and supported the democracy as it attempted to cope with these threats to its survival.
- ◆ The Kapp Putsch of 1920, an attempt to overthrow the government by forces of the right, was triggered by the government's moves to carry out the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.
- ◆ Right-wing extremists were involved in political assassinations in the 1920s.
- ◆ The army, as a right-wing organisation, was not prepared to act against the forces of the right, and for this reason they refused to support the government in putting down the Kapp Putsch.
- ◆ The government fled the capital of Berlin and the putsch failed only because of working-class resistance and a general strike being called.
- ◆ The Kapp Putsch revealed the importance and influence of the German army in politics.
- ◆ During the 1920s General von Seeckt carried out important reforms in the German army.
- ◆ Many of the changes and reforms violated the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- ◆ Von Seeckt preserved the standing and influence of the army, and laid the foundation for the new German army that would emerge in the 1930s under the Nazis.

- 1 What does the Kapp Putsch reveal about the relationship between the German Army and the Weimar Government?
- 2 Why was the German army prepared to support the government when it was threatened by the Spartacist uprising in 1919, but not prepared to support it when threatened by the Kapp Putsch in 1920?
- 3 Explain the significance of the Kapp Putsch in 1920 and why the putsch failed.
- 4 How was the German army affected by the Treaty of Versailles? How did General von Seeckt minimise the impact?
- 5 Recount two events involving right-wing political extremists in the 1920s and explain why they were important.
- 6 Which of the following statements is not supported by the historical evidence?
 - A Despite the military provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was able to carry out a degree of military rebuilding in the 1920s.
 - B Germany was able to use links with foreign nations to assist in its military recovery.
 - C The German army played no part in German politics in the 1920s.
 - D The election of Field Marshal von Hindenburg as president of Germany in 1925 was greeted with approval by the military leadership.
- 7 How did the judiciary influence the political climate in Germany?
- 8 As a class, debate the following statement: 'The right posed a greater threat to the Weimar Republic than the left.'

3.3

1923: A DIFFICULT YEAR

1923 was a particularly challenging year for the Weimar Republic. The Treaty of Versailles continued to provide opportunities for the enemies of democracy, both on the left and the right, to continue their attacks on the government. The German economy had been weakened ever since the war, but in 1923 the reparations terms of the treaty began to cut deep, generating further challenges for the Weimar state.

The problem of reparations, 1923

Despite the fact that the Germans had to pay reparations, their economy was potentially still the strongest in Europe. Germany had retained its iron and steel resources, and the country's industry and infrastructure, including factories and the transport system, were still intact. Germany had the potential for a rapid economic recovery.

British economist John Maynard Keynes, who had been at the Peace Conference in 1919, had warned at the time that the reparations burden on Germany would seriously hold back the country's potential for any real economic recovery. This argument is now increasingly challenged by scholarly opinion.

In 1921 the German government was given the final reparations figure to be paid – 132 billion gold marks. It was to be paid in annual instalments, in cash and in resources like coal and iron ore. The successive German governments repeatedly challenged the amount, and in 1924 and again in 1929 the reparations figure was negotiated down. When the Nazis took over the government in 1933 they simply cancelled reparations altogether.

The presentation of the Allied reparation demands caused a political crisis and the fall of the government. A new coalition government was quickly formed with the Socialists (SPD), the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the Centre Party. Joseph Wirth of the Centre Party became the new chancellor. Wirth was a firm believer in democracy and the republic, and he had included in his government another true republican in Walther Rathenau, who became 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 that Germany seek to 'fulfil' the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles. It was believed that Germany's efforts to meet its obligations would increase the possibility of renegotiating and modifying some of the terms of the settlement, particularly given that Clause 234 of the treaty allowed for a review based on Germany's capacity to pay.



Armed French troops guard a German steam locomotive in the Ruhr as rail shipments of coal are prepared to be sent to France.

The occupation of the Ruhr, January 1923

The Wirth government, following the policy of fulfilment, met the first reparation 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 reparation deadline. In December 1922, after a year of negotiation, the Reparation Commission declared that Germany was in default (behind) in the delivery of coal and telegraph poles to France. The following month 60 000 French and Belgian troops crossed the border and occupied the Ruhr, the most important industrial area of Germany.

The French government was determined that Germany must be made to meet its obligations. They believed that the Germans had never accepted defeat and that France must reassert its authority and demonstrate that it had both the strength and the will to force Germany to accept the Treaty of Versailles.



Passive resistance

The occupation of the Ruhr triggered a wave of anti-French 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 refused to cooperate in any way with the French.

The French in turn were forced to bring in workers to mine and move the coal, and ultimately more than 100 000 troops to control the restless population and 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. More than 150 Germans were killed in protests, including the shooting of 12 German workers at the Krupp steelworks in March 1923.

RUHR OCCUPATION



Alamy Stock Photo/Photo 12

A German poster urging workers to follow the policy of passive resistance during the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. The caption reads, 'No, you won't be able to force me!'

SOURCE STUDY

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the worker being encouraged to do?
- 2 Describe the way the poster depicts both the German worker and the French soldiers. What message is being conveyed in this image?

The problem of hyperinflation, 1923

Immediately after the war, Germany had little capacity for economic recovery. The country 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 this was resisted, particularly by the industrialists, who actually benefited from **inflation**, and because of the fear that it would increase unemployment. To meet the growing cost not only of reparations but also of wages and war pensions, 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 had been worth 4.2 marks, but by January 1920 it 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.

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, it was forced to spend its scarce foreign reserves of currency to import coal to support other German industries that had relied on Ruhr coal.

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 to the point that it 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 more than 44 trillion marks in circulation, with the presses producing another 46 billion marks per day. Prices in Germany were



This 50 million mark banknote was issued in November 1923, at the height of the nation's hyperinflation. They were printed so quickly that the reverse sides were left blank.

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 that figure stood at 160 million marks. In November, at the height of the hyperinflation, one US dollar was worth 4 200 000 000 000 marks. Banks charged 35 per cent interest per day on loans. An 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, but not every German suffered; indeed, some sections of society actually profited from the inflation. The Junker landowning class was generally not affected, and the smaller farming class also avoided the full impact of the hyperinflation. Food was always a valuable commodity, and farmers were able to increase their wealth by barter, which became a widespread practice as the currency became worthless. However, it was the industrialists and the business class who gained most from Germany's economic woes. The inflated currency enabled them to wipe out their debts, and business interests that had access to foreign currency or had the ability to sell on foreign markets made enormous profits.

Those who suffered the most were the people on fixed incomes or wages, and those who lived off their savings. This tended to be the cautious German middle class and much of the German working class. They were overwhelmed by the inflation, which saw the value of their savings and investments disappear.

TABLE 3.1 Exchange rate for German marks against the US dollar 1914–1923

Year	Month	Equivalent value of one US dollar
1914	July	4.2 marks
1919	January	8.9 marks
1920	January	14 marks
1921	January	64.9 marks
1922	January	191.8 marks
1923	January	17 792 marks
1923	July	353 412 marks
1923	September	98 860 000 marks
1923	November	200 000 000 000 marks



THE REALITY OF HYPERINFLATION

Life became tragicomic. 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.

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

The old were equally helpless. One elderly writer named Maximilian Bern withdrew all his savings, more than 100 000 marks and spent them on one subway ticket. He took a ride around Berlin and then locked himself in his apartment and starved to death.

Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge – A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s*, Harper Row, New York, 1972, p. 126.

A factory worker described payday, which was every day at 11:00 a.m.: ‘At 11:00 in the morning a siren sounded, and everybody gathered in the factory forecourt, where a five-ton lorry was drawn up loaded brimful with paper money. The chief cashier and his assistants climbed up on top. They read out names and just threw out bundles of notes. As soon as you had caught one you made a dash for the nearest shop and bought just anything that was going.’

George JW Goodman, *Paper Money*, GK Hall, Boston, 1982, pp. 57–62.



A shop assistant using 1 million-mark notes as a pad of scrap paper during the period of the hyperinflation in 1923

Year	Month	Cost of one loaf
1918		0.63 marks
1923	January	250 marks
	July	3 465 marks
	September	1 512 000 marks
	November	201 000 000 000 marks

- 1 How did hyperinflation affect each of the following groups?
 - i Workers
 - ii Industrialists
 - iii Junkers
 - iv Pensioners
 - v Farmers
- 2 Evaluate the usefulness of one of these sources to a historian studying the impact of the hyperinflation crisis. In your answer, consider the type of sources, the nature of the impact, and the groups that would have been affected.
- 3 Using specific evidence from the sources above, write an extended paragraph that explains the impact of hyperinflation on German society.

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. Social hardship increased as the economy floundered and the German currency plummeted. In August the government finally fell, and President Ebert called on the leader of the German People's Party (DVP), Gustav Stresemann, to form a new government. Displaying his considerable political and negotiating skills, Stresemann was able to form a coalition of the Socialists (SPD), the Centre Party, the German Democratic Party (DDP) and his own German People's Party (DVP). At a time of real danger for the republic, Stresemann put together the so-called 'Great Coalition', which

brought together parties from the moderate left, the middle and the moderate right of German politics. His political opponents were the German Communist Party (KPD) and the more radical, right-wing German National People's Party (DNVP).



Gustav Stresemann

GUSTAV STRESEMANN

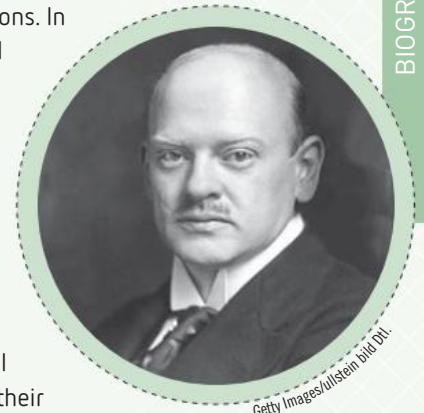
Gustav Stresemann was one of the few outstanding political figures of the Weimar Republic. Born into a middle-class Berlin family in 1878, Stresemann had been a businessman before entering politics in 1907, and in 1917 he was elected leader of the National Liberal Party. Stresemann had a deeply felt sense of nationalism and he supported the war effort and the policies of Ludendorff, including the use of unrestricted submarine warfare and the severe treaty of Brest-Litovsk that Germany imposed on defeated Russia in 1918.

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 a situation and a realistic assessment of what was possible.

Stresemann had supported the monarchy, but after the republic was proclaimed he accepted the reality of the new political situation and

became one of its true champions. In 1919 when the National Liberal Party split into the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the German National People's Party (DNVP), Stresemann formed his own conservative political party, the German People's Party (DVP). He was a nationalist and a democrat who distrusted both the radical left and the radical right, with their putsch attempts and their use of political violence.

From 13 August to 23 November 1923, Stresemann was chancellor of a coalition government. In his short-lived time as chancellor he addressed the issue of the hyperinflation that was crippling the nation.



Getty Images/ullstein bild dlt

Gustav Stresemann (1878–1929), German chancellor from August to November 1923 and foreign minister from 1923 to 1929

BIOGRAPHY

The end of passive resistance

The Stresemann government came to office at a critical time in the history of the Weimar Republic. The French were in their eighth month of occupation in the Ruhr, the German economy was in chaos and the currency worthless, and separatist movements in the German states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia threatened the unity of the republic.

Stresemann's first major step was to call off the policy of passive resistance in the Ruhr. This was an act of great political courage and it enraged German nationalists, who saw it as a betrayal of the nation and its honour. But for Stresemann the reality of the situation was that Germany could not begin to remedy the disastrous economic situation until the Ruhr problem was settled, and to settle it Germany would have to give in to the French.

AN APPEAL BY THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT, 26 SEPTEMBER 1923

To the German People!

On January 11 French and Belgian troops occupied the German Ruhr region against law and treaty. Since this time the Ruhr region and the Rhineland had to suffer the severest difficulties ...

Economic life in occupied and unoccupied Germany is ruined ... to preserve the life of the people and the state, we are today faced with the bitter necessity of breaking off the struggle. We know that in doing so we demand of the inhabitants of the occupied areas even greater emotional sacrifices than before. Heroic was their struggle, unprecedented their self control ... We call upon the German People to faithfully hold

SOURCE STUDY

→

together in the coming period of the hardest emotional trials and material want. Only thus will we shatter all intentions of smashing the Reich, only thus can we regain the freedom which is our inalienable right!

Reich President Ebert

Reich Government: Stresemann, Schmidt, Gessler, Brauns, von Raumer, Radbruch, Oeser, Luther, Hilferding, Fuchs.

Quoted in Johannes Hohlfeld (ed.), *Dokumente der deutschen Politik und Geschichte von 1848 bis zur Gegenwart*, vol. 2, p. 131.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr in 1923.
- 2 What is passive resistance?
- 3 According to the source, why did Stresemann call off passive resistance?
- 4 Provide evidence from the source to support the claim Ebert was a nationalist.
- 5 Using evidence from the source, assess the impact of passive resistance on Germany.

GUSTAV STRESEMANN

SOURCE STUDY



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 Look at the date of publication. What is the context for the cartoon?
- 2 Explain why the figure of Gustav Stresemann was depicted in this way? What message is the cartoonist attempting to convey?

The Rentenmark

There was no prospect of any economic recovery until Germany had a stable currency and the German people had faith in their currency. Two days after the Reichstag voted to give the government emergency powers, the government used these emergency powers to tackle the urgent problem of inflation. Stresemann appointed a brilliant young banker, Hjalmar Schacht, to deal with the reforms of the currency. The printing of worthless currency ceased and the mark was recalled. A new currency called the **Rentenmark** was put into circulation. The old mark had traditionally been backed by gold, but since Germany now lacked adequate gold reserves the new Rentenmark was 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 1 billion of the old marks.

The government also carried out long overdue economic reforms. The budget was balanced, government expenditure was cut, particularly after passive resistance ended, 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 withdrawn and a new German mark was introduced.

New political unrest and the threat of separatism, 1923

In the midst of the difficulties with the economy, the Stresemann government also faced new political challenges from both the extreme left and right.

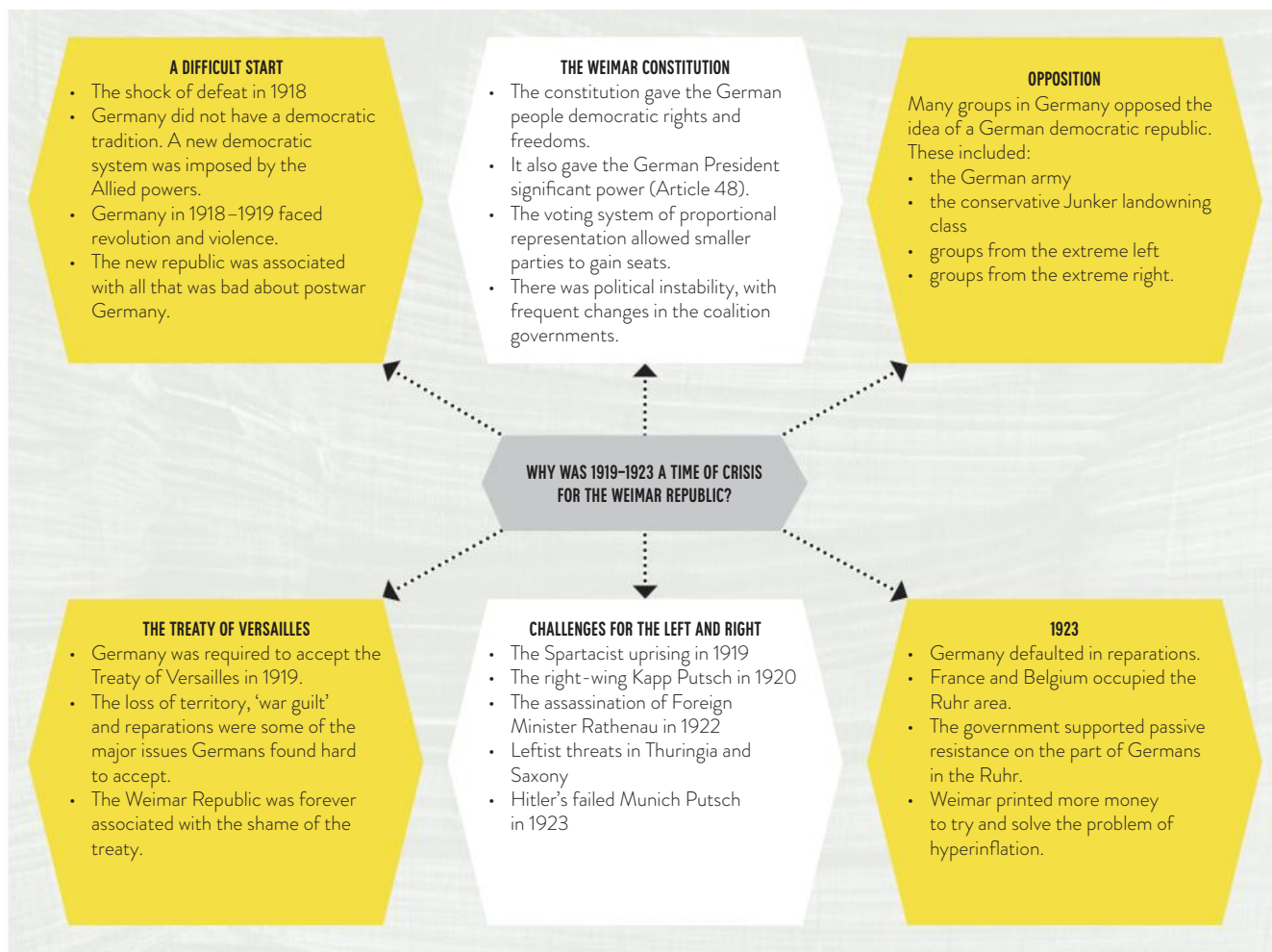
The decision to end passive resistance had aroused nationalist anger. In the southern state of Bavaria – always a hotbed of political unrest – the right-wing government of Gustav von Kahr defied the government in Berlin, while the military commander in Bavaria also backed the Bavarian state authority. Talk of Bavarian separatism was once again in the air. To the north of Bavaria, in the neighbouring states of Thuringia and Saxony, a union of the socialists and communists in the state governments presented a new difficulty, as these radical left-wing governments also began to challenge the authority of the government in Berlin.

To protect national unity Stresemann asked President Ebert to declare a state of emergency under Article 48, and the German army was ordered in to remove the governments of Thuringia and Saxony. The army under General von Seeckt, motivated by its long standing hatred of the extreme left, acted and the threat from the left in Thuringia and Saxony was removed.

In Bavaria, the Nazi Party, a small but growing extreme right-wing party led by Adolf Hitler, took the opportunity amid the political unrest to try to seize control of the Bavarian government. On 8 November 1923, in what became known as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler and his followers tried to take over the government in Bavaria as the first step in a march to Berlin (see also pp. 112–17). The attempt failed, as neither the Bavarian army nor von Kahr, the right-wing prime minister of Bavaria, were prepared to support it. The following day, a defiant march by Nazis through the centre of Munich ended in gunfire as the police moved in. Sixteen Nazis were killed and Hitler was arrested.

The fall of the Stresemann government, November 1923

On 2 November 1923 the SPD withdrew from the coalition government. Stresemann survived as chancellor for a few more weeks, but after a vote of no confidence in the Reichstag (led by the Socialists) was carried 231 to 156 Stresemann tendered his resignation to President Ebert. For President Ebert it was a matter of despair that his own SPD had deserted Stresemann. ‘Your reasons for unseating the Chancellor will be forgotten in six weeks,’ he told the SPD leader, ‘but you will be suffering the consequences of your stupidity after ten years have passed.’³



Weimar Germany 1919–1923

3.3 SUMMARY

1923: A DIFFICULT YEAR

- ◆ The German government followed 'the policy of fulfilment', an attempt to meet some of the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.
- ◆ In 1923 Germany faced a particularly difficult year, with a failing economy and an inability to pay reparations.
- ◆ As a response and to assert their authority, France and Belgium occupied the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, in 1923.
- ◆ The German response to the occupation of the Ruhr was a policy of 'passive resistance', which made the situation worse.
- ◆ Germany experienced aggressive hyperinflation, which destroyed the value of the German currency.
- ◆ In Bavaria, the Nazi Party, then virtually unknown in the rest of Germany, failed in an attempt to seize control of the Bavarian government.
- ◆ Financial reforms, mainly the work of Gustav Stresemann, ended the hyperinflation and set Germany on the path to a degree of economic stability after 1923.

- 1 What do you understand by the following terms?
 - i policy of fulfilment
 - ii passive resistance
 - iii hyperinflation
 - iv Rentenmark
- 2 Why did France and Belgium occupy the Ruhr in 1923? What were some of the consequences of this action for Germany?
- 3 Why did Stresemann call off passive resistance? Why was passive resistance unpopular with many Germans?
- 4 Answer the following questions based on the table below.
 - i How many different governments had Germany had by January 1925?
 - ii When was the SPD part of a coalition government?
 - iii When was the Zentrum part of a coalition government?
 - iv When was the DDP part of a coalition government?
 - v Of the 10 Chancellors in this period, how many belonged to the SPD or Zentrum?
 - vi Based on this information, what can you conclude about the nature of the Weimar governments?

Chancellor	Coalition	Tenure in office	Duration
Friedrich Ebert (SPD)	SPD, USPD	November 1918–February 1919	96 days
Philipp Scheidemann (SPD)	SPD, Zentrum, DDP	February 1919–June 1919	127 days
Gustav Bauer (SPD)	SPD, Zentrum, DDP	June 1919–March 1920	279 days
Hermann Müller (SPD)	SPD, Zentrum, DDP	March 1920–June 1920	86 days
Konstantin Fehrenbach (Zentrum)	DDP, Zentrum, DVP	June 1920–May 1921	313 days
Joseph Wirth (Zentrum)	SPD, Zentrum, DDP	May 1921–October 1921 October 1921–November 1922	1 year, 188 days
Wilhelm Cuno (non-aligned)	DDP, Zentrum, DVP	November 1922–August 1923	1 year, 202 days
Gustav Stresemann (DVP)	SPD, Zentrum, DVP, DDP	August 1923–November 1923	109 days
Wilhelm Marx (Zentrum)	Zentrum, DVP, DDP	November 1923–January 1925	1 year, 46 days

- 5 Research one of the following figures: Friedrich Ebert, Philipp Scheidemann or Gustav Stresemann. Write an obituary for your individual that would be suitable for publication in a German newspaper in the Weimar period.
- 6 Collect 10 sources that demonstrate a range of German experiences in the period 1918–1923. For each source, write a paragraph explaining why it would be useful to a historian studying this period.
- 7 Essay question: To what extent was the Treaty of Versailles responsible for the instability in Germany between 1919 and 1923?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTION

- 1 Explain how the German army maintained its position and influence during the period of the Weimar Republic.
 - 2 How successful was the Weimar Republic in dealing with some of the major problems that confronted it during the period 1919–1923?
 - 3 To what degree could it be argued that the challenges faced by the Weimar Republic from 1919 to 1923 came from both within and outside Germany? To what extent was the Treaty of Versailles responsible for the instability in Germany between 1919 and 1923?
-

Endnotes

- 1 Von Seeckt, quoted in A De Jonge, *The Weimar Chronicle: Prelude to Hitler*, Paddington Press, New York, 1978, p. 64.
- 2 Quoted in Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, vol. 1, Antheneum, New York, 1970, p. 217.
- 3 Quoted in Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, vol. 1, Antheneum, New York, 1970, p. 217.

4

CHAPTER

The Weimar Republic: The good years 1924–1929

4.1

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL
STABILITY

4.2

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF
THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

4.3

GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN
THE 1920S



Marlene Dietrich in the film *The Blue Angel* (1930). From her film and cabaret work in the Weimar era, Dietrich became a world-famous entertainer.

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

cabaret

A form of entertainment featuring music and dance, usually performed in clubs. Cabaret was a very popular form of entertainment in Weimar Germany.

Dawes Plan

The plan, prepared in 1924 by a committee led by American banker Charles Dawes, to adjust Germany's reparations payments to meet Germany's capacity to pay.

expressionist movement

A nineteenth-century movement in the arts in which the artist sought to convey inner experiences and emotions, rather than objective reality. The artist seeks to express the feelings that an object arouses, rather than depicting the object itself.

Gross National Product (GNP)

The value of all goods and services produced in a country in any one year.

Locarno Treaty

An important treaty signed in October 1925 between Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Belgium. It was the start of a new relationship between Germany and its former enemies, and as a result Germany joined the League of Nations the following year.

modernism

A cultural movement that challenged the traditional or older forms of artistic and creative expression. Modernism represented a new style of art, literature, music, theatre, architecture and other forms of creative expression.

Modernism (what was modern and new) was popular in the 1920s, and Germany embraced much of this new style.

welfare state

A state where 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 provided to those in most need.

Young Plan

Similar to the Dawes Plan of 1924, the Young Plan of 1929 further reduced Germany's reparation repayment figure.

TIMELINE

The good years 1924–1929



4.1

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STABILITY

Compared with what had come before and what would follow, the years from 1924 to 1928 were good years for Germany. The republic had survived the crises of 1923 and entered a period of comparative calm and stability. The economy prospered and the political turmoil of earlier days gave way to a time of relative political stability. This period saw the flowering of a brilliant culture, making Germany the European centre of creative expression in music, film, art and literature and transformed Berlin into one of the most exciting cities in Europe. Some of the bitterness of World War I finally eased, and Germany was once again accepted as an equal in the European community.

Much of this stability has been attributed to Gustav Stresemann. In his brief time as chancellor he had solved the problem of the Ruhr occupation and put in motion the reforms that would end hyperinflation.

The Dawes Plan, 1924

One of the foundations for Germany's economic growth was its determination to improve relationships with its former foes. This process began in 1924 when Stresemann, by then foreign minister, supported the **Dawes Plan**. Great Britain and the United States had always accepted that, if Germany was to pay reparations, the German economy had to be stabilised and Germany had to be given the capacity to pay. As 'passive resistance' ended and the Stresemann government sought to remedy the hyperinflation, the Reparations Commission set up a committee, led by the American banker Charles G Dawes, to investigate ways to help Germany stabilise its economy. It was the start of realism over revenge.

Under the Dawes Plan, announced in April 1924, Germany was still required to pay reparations, starting with a payment of 1000 million marks in 1925 and increasing over the next five years to a figure of 2500 million marks. After that, payment would be adjusted to reflect Germany's capacity to pay. The Dawes Plan reduced the burden of reparations, which allowed Germany to borrow money. As part of the plan, Germany was to receive an immediate loan, and France finally agreed to leave the Ruhr. Germany accepted the Dawes Plan, and it marked the start of a period of impressive economic growth in Germany.

Foreign loans and a new prosperity

Germany's economic recovery was made possible in part by new loans that it was able to secure, mainly from the United States. Between 1925 and 1930 Germany received more than US\$25 billion in long- and short-term loans. In fact, Germany now received more in loans than it paid in reparations.

The key to the German recovery was this large amount of foreign capital that flowed into the country from 1924. For most Germans, the standard of living began to improve as money was spent on public works, housing, transport and social welfare. Germany already had great industrial potential and the flow of money, the return of confidence and the creative determination of the German people saw a rapid growth in Germany's industrial strength.

Industry was restructured and modernised and greater efficiencies were introduced, as well as new management techniques. By 1928 coal, iron and steel production levels had surpassed the pre-war figures of 1913. German exports doubled in the period to 1929, with Germany second only to Britain as the leading exporter in Europe.

The welfare state in Weimar Germany

The suffering and hardship Germans had faced during World War I strengthened the belief that the new German state should take more responsibility for the welfare of its citizens. One of the great achievements of this period was the provision of increased welfare – in fact, some historians even suggest that Weimar Germany became the first true *Sozialstaat* or **welfare state**.

The Socialist Party (SPD), Germany's largest political party, embraced the need to provide welfare in order to win the support of the working class for the republic. Already, German workers had the eight-hour day, and an arbitration system also protected workers' rights. Wages increased, trade unions gained a new importance and their membership soared. By 1929, 6 million German workers were in trade unions. Considerable progress was made by the different Weimar governments

after 1923 to introduce welfare in the form of war pensions for former soldiers, as well as invalid, widows' and orphans' pensions. The money spent on social welfare increased in the 1920s to the point that by 1928, 26 per cent of Germany's **Gross National Product (GNP)** was spent on welfare, compared with 15 per cent in 1914. Homelessness fell dramatically as more than 2 million new homes were built.

The Weimar Constitution had included a provision (Article 161) that 'The Reich shall organise a comprehensive system of (social) insurance', and in 1927 the Unemployment Insurance Act was passed, providing a national unemployment insurance scheme to cover more than 17 million workers against the possibility of becoming unemployed. Employers and workers contributed to this fund, but when mass unemployment occurred as a result of the Great Depression the funds were soon exhausted, and the system failed. Another law of the same year, the Provisional Work Hours Law, also limited the number of hours employees could work and provided overtime payments if they exceeded these hours.

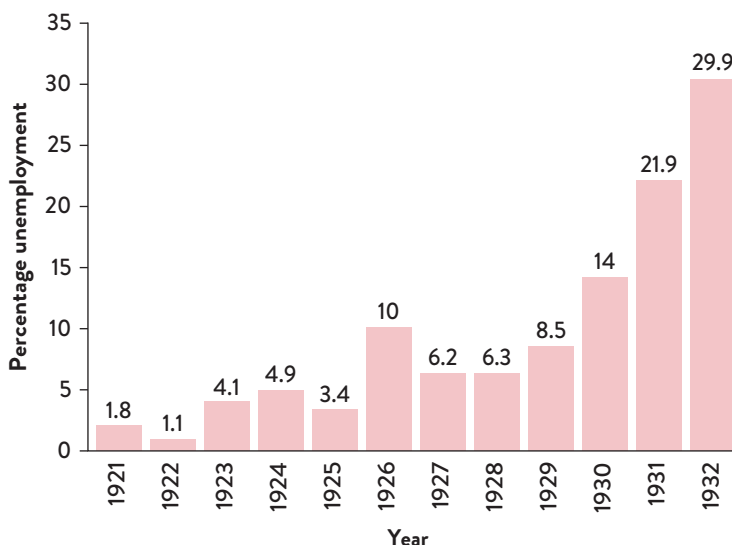
The middle class

Not surprisingly, the social welfare changes were not welcomed by all employers or by big business, who disliked the rising power of the German trade unions. The hardworking middle-class Germans were also unhappy. They had been hit hardest by the hyperinflation of 1923, and now their taxes had increased to help pay for the welfare state.

The German middle class did not benefit nearly as much from the economic reforms of the 1920s as the working class. While



People waiting in line for social welfare benefits in Berlin, 1927



Unemployment in Germany as a percentage of the working-class population 1921–1932

class wages grew, middle-class wages remained relatively static, and the benefits of the welfare state were often unavailable to middle-class or white-collar workers. By 1928 these white-collar workers were the largest group among the unemployed. In time, support for the Weimar Republic waned among middle-class Germans and also among powerful business interests, who were disadvantaged by the growing power of trade unions and the loss of profit to welfare and unemployment insurance schemes.

Weaknesses in the economy

Although the 1920s was a time of economic prosperity for Germany, this growth was built on weak foundations. Germany was living off borrowed money, dependent on foreign loans and investments. By 1929 Germany had a foreign debt of almost 25 billion marks. As the government spent money, particularly on the social welfare agenda, it was unable to deliver a balanced budget. This in turn made it more dependent on foreign loans. If this money supply was to cease, as it did with the start of the Depression, then the German economy would collapse. Stresemann had foreseen the danger ahead. 'We in Germany in recent years have lived on borrowed money,' he wrote in November 1928. 'If a crisis ever hits us and the Americans withdraw their short-term credits then we would be bankrupt ... we are not only militarily disarmed, we are also financially disarmed.'¹ It was a view echoed by the German economic historian Karl Borchardt, who claimed that the Weimar economy in the good years was 'an abnormal in fact a sick economy which could not possibly have gone on the same way even if the world depression had not occurred.'²

Another weakness in the economy was the fact 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. When they saw their position challenged with the onset of the Depression and the threat from the rising German Communist Party (KPD) after 1930, they embraced and supported the extreme right, and helped put Hitler and the Nazis into power.

Unemployment remained high throughout this period, from 5 per cent in 1924 to almost 9 per cent or 8.5 million unemployed in 1929. In rural Germany, agriculture remained depressed. By 1928 agricultural output was still at only 75 per cent of the pre-war figure, a situation not helped by the fall in prices for agricultural produce in the 1920s. 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.

Political stability, 1924–1929

After the political disorder and violence that had marked the first five years of the Weimar Republic, the five years between 1924 and 1929 were a period of relative political stability. During this time, despite the fact that Germany had six changes of government, the moderate political parties – the German Democratic Party (DDP), the Centre Party and the German People's Party (DVP) – were the basis of the coalition governments of the republic. The largest of the German political parties, the SPD, remained outside of coalition governments from early 1924 to 1928.



Potsdamerplatz in the heart of Berlin in 1925

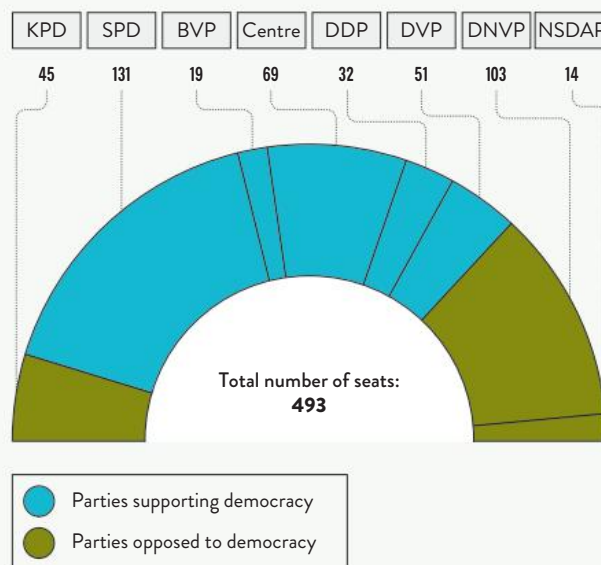
Getty Images/Hulton Archive

During this time of relative stability, the extremist political parties of both the left and right did not do very well. In the three elections between 1924 and 1928, the communists averaged 10.7 per cent of the vote, and the Nazi Party on the extreme right only 3.6 per cent. For a time even the right-wing German National People's Party (DNVP) seemed to reconcile itself to the idea of a republic and joined the coalition, and after 1928 the Socialists (SPD) returned to government, strengthening the opportunities for political harmony further still.

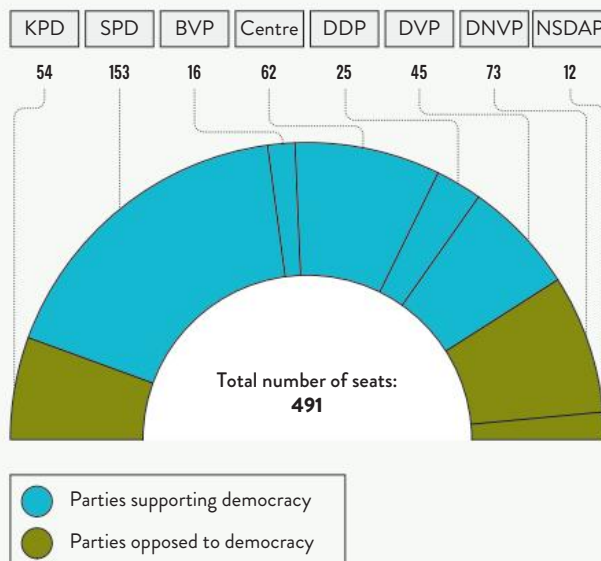
The suggestion that there was true political stability in these years has been challenged by the fact that there were six changes of government during this time. The political parties remained committed to their own narrow self-interests. The opportunity to develop a base for a more lasting form of stable government, one that may have withstood the challenges ahead, was never taken during these few years of political calm.

REICHSTAG ELECTIONS, 1924 AND 1928

December 1924



May 1928



QUESTIONS

- 1 Which parties
 - i Supported democracy
 - ii Opposed democracy
- 2 From which side of politics was there the most opposition to democracy?
- 3 'Workers made the most gains during this period.' What evidence is there in this data to support that claim?

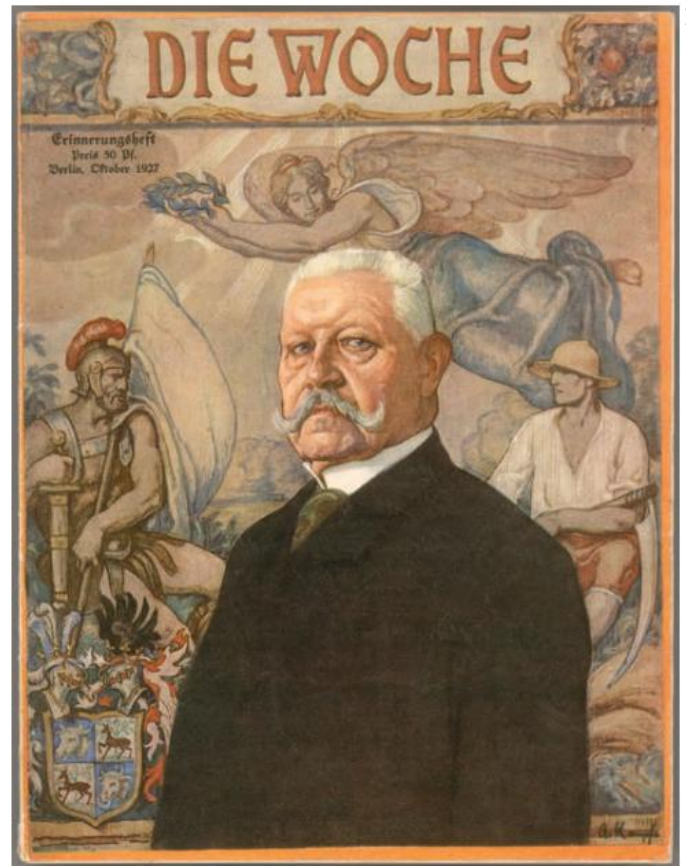
President von Hindenburg, 1925

In February 1925 President Ebert died suddenly after an appendicitis operation. Ebert had courageously led the German people since the chaotic days of the revolution of 1918, first as head of the government that replaced the Kaiser and then as the first president of the Weimar Republic.

Most of the major political parties stood a candidate in the elections for a new president. No one received a majority, so a second round of voting was needed. In the second ballot the nationalist groups pressured retired field marshal Paul von Hindenburg to represent the forces of the right. Hindenburg had been reluctant to stand, but the 77-year-old achieved a narrow victory, and became president.

The Weimar Republic now had a president who really did not believe in the republic. Everything in Hindenburg's conservative Junker military background represented loyalty to the old Germany. Indeed, before accepting the office of Reich President, Hindenburg sought permission from the ex-Kaiser, still in exile in Holland. His election was welcomed by the army and right-wing groups, who became more tolerant of the republic now that Hindenburg was its head.

Hindenburg worked conscientiously to carry out his duties and to uphold both the republic and the constitution. However, he was an old man, and historians have speculated about how the history of Germany may have differed if another man had held this powerful post in the critical years of the Great Depression and the rise of the Nazis. Until his health failed and the political problems became too great, Hindenburg used the prestige of his name and reputation to make the system work, even though the system was not of his liking. To many Germans, Hindenburg brought a respectability to the office of president that Ebert had never been able to achieve. The British Ambassador put it clearly.



Paul von Hindenburg, President of the Weimar Republic, as he appeared on the cover of *Die Woche* (*The Week*), a weekly illustrated German newspaper, in 1927



‘The truth is the Germans do not want a president in a top hat ... he has to wear a uniform and a chestful of medals. When they see as their leader a man who wears a top hat and looks as though he might have been a neighbour, then each thinks of himself “I could do that too”.’³

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 in Germany; 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 *Der Rote Frontkämpferbund* (the Red Front Fighters’ League) supported the German Communist Party. From the late 1920s the Nazi Party had its own very effective paramilitary group, the Sturmabteilung or stormtroopers (SA), in their distinctive brown shirts.

THE NATURE OF THE GERMAN ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- ◆ The period 1924–1928 was a time of relative economic recovery and political stability in Germany.
- ◆ The Dawes Plan of April 1924, which adjusted the reparation figure, marked the start of Germany’s economic recovery.
- ◆ Germany borrowed heavily, especially from the United States, and used its foreign loans to grow the economy.
- ◆ There were significant advances in the development of the welfare state in Germany, which benefited the working class in particular, but alienated others.
- ◆ The economic stability led to a period of relative political stability after 1924, when extremist political parties gained little ground.
- ◆ Economic prosperity was not experienced by all classes. Many of the German middle class experienced less improvement in their living standards than other sections of society.
- ◆ With the trade unions and social welfare system, the working class appeared to be doing better, as many middle-class people in their own businesses continued to struggle.
- ◆ Farmers and people working on the land experienced much less prosperity. Agriculture needed a significant degree of modernisation, which did not happen, and the level of agricultural output never increased in the way that industrial production did.
- ◆ The economy had the underlying problems of heavy dependence on foreign loans, growing antagonism between the industrialists and the workers, and the actual cost of production. Wages and production costs made many German goods too expensive, and by the late 1920s, Germany had difficulty finding adequate export markets.
- ◆ The KPD, still influenced by Moscow, saw the SPD as its main rival and so helped to split the working-class vote.
- ◆ President Ebert died in 1925 and was followed by President von Hindenburg, whose election reconciled many in the army and on the right of German politics to support the republic.

- 1 Which of the following statements can be justified by historical evidence?
 - A That Germans industrial production increased in the period after 1924.
 - B That the German economic recovery after 1924 was based very heavily on foreign loans
 - C That the Dawes Plan ended the German requirement to pay reparations
 - D That extremist parties of the left and right lost political influence between 1924 and 1928.
- 2 Define the meaning of the term welfare state. Summarise four key reforms that took place in the Weimar era.
- 3 Explain why democracy stabilised in the period 1924–1928.
- 4 'The economic position is only flourishing on the surface. Germany is in fact dancing on a volcano. If the short-term credits are called in, a large section of our economy would collapse.' Gustav Stresemann to Parker Gilbert US the Agent General for Reparations, 1928. With reference to the above quote, in a paragraph, assess how stable the German economy was by 1928.
- 5 Class debate: The social welfare reforms of the mid 1920s were irresponsible.

4.2

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIFE OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

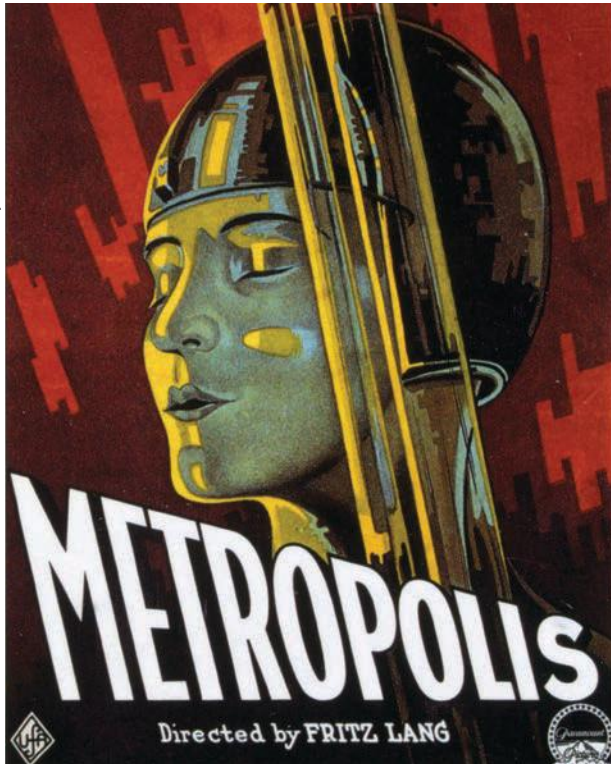
During the 1920s there was a remarkable upsurge in cultural life in Germany. A particular feature of this time was the sudden outpouring of new creative expression. Some historians see this as the true start of the modern age, a time when new attitudes and social values emerged to challenge the old. It happened in the United States and in a number of European cities, such as Paris, but nowhere was it more evident than in Weimar Germany. Despite the political and economic difficulties, this period saw the flowering of a brilliant culture that made Germany the European centre of creative expression in music, film, art and literature and transformed Berlin into one of the most exciting cities in Europe. The war had wiped away the old Europe of control and conformity. Life was given back to a new generation intent on embracing **modernism**, the age of the new.



Berlin 1920s
Weimar culture

Cultural life in Weimar Germany

One of the reasons for this cultural and artistic expression was the free and tolerant environment of the Weimar Republic. The Germans were among the best-educated people in Europe, and ideas had always been highly valued. The new constitution made Weimar Germany a more 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 free rein to their creativity and embrace the innovative and the experimental.



A poster promoting Fritz Lang's futuristic film *Metropolis*, released in 1926



Weimar cinema



The Bauhaus

Berlin became a world leader in the field of cinema, and the progressive German film industry of the 1920s produced more films in that decade than the rest of Europe combined. Great advances were made in film and sound technology in the 1920s, and Germany was the home of many brilliant directors, such as Fritz Lang, Josef von Sternberg and Ernst Lubitsch. The cinematic masterpieces produced in Germany included the futuristic *Metropolis*, the expressionist *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*, *Nosferatu* and *The Blue Angel*, which launched its star Marlene Dietrich onto the world stage.

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. Within the creative arts the **expressionist movement** was the most influential, as artists, writers and filmmakers sought to convey experiences and emotions in their work. Berlin became the thriving centre of this new cultural expression. 'Everything became possible,' wrote one observer, 'everything became Experience with a capital E and a capital X.'⁴

Theatre and cinema

Provocative theatre and **cabaret** flourished during the decade, much of it with a political and social message. One figure associated with this movement who achieved lasting fame was poet, playwright and theatre director 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 Marxist (communist), and much of his work conveyed his disillusionment with capitalist middle-class society. Erwin Piscator, another leading figure of the time, developed the concept of the Proletarian Theatre, which produced plays that addressed social realities and challenged the values of traditional middle-class society.

Literature and architecture

The 1920s also saw the emergence of brilliant literature, featuring writers such as Thomas Mann, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929, Franz Kafka and Hermann Hesse. In 1924 the German writer Erich Maria Remarque wrote about the uselessness of war in his classic story about World War I, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published in 1928.

Germany of the 1920s also challenged 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



The Bauhaus complex in Dessau, Germany. The building had workshops for creative design, architecture and fine art. The building survived World War II and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site.

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.

Modern art

There were also significant changes in the world of art itself. In expressionist painting the world and reality were interpreted through the perception of the artists, who used new techniques to express feelings and emotions. One significant artist of the period was Otto Dix, whose modernist style sought to capture feeling by depicting his portrait subjects with brutal honesty. Much German art of this time, unsurprisingly, also reflected the suffering and hardship that many Germans had endured. Among other significant painters of the period were Paul Klee, Max Beckmann, Heinrich Zille, and George Grosz, who criticised middle-class conservative society in a series of realistic drawings and caricatures. In the 1920s Berlin replaced Paris as the world centre of modern art.



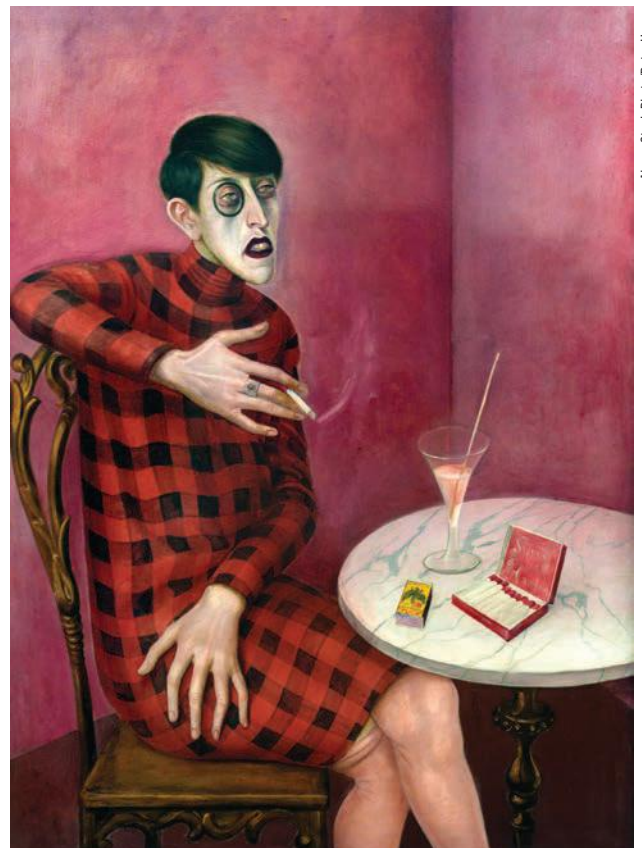
German Expressionism

Modernism

The explosion of new ideas and cultural experimentation was accompanied by a new way of life for many Germans. Germany embraced many of the social changes coming from the United States – dress styles, music, including jazz, and the breaking down of what was considered old-fashioned. It was a brief period of optimism and hope, a time to embrace what was modern and new. After the suffering of the past, Germans enjoyed this brief period of stability and prosperity. A word often used to describe the social and cultural life of this period in Germany was modernism.

Modernism and the accompanying social changes were mainly evident in the major German cities. Not all Germans shared in these changes, and many reacted against modernism with its new cultural expressions, its liberation of German women, and its tolerance of issues like birth control and homosexuality. Some Germans saw the new developments in culture and expression as offensive and believed they were creating a degenerate society in Germany. During these years there were examples of a reaction against modernism. Right-wing conservative groups attacked the government for allowing traditional German values to be undermined, while the Catholic Centre Party led a demand for a return to true German values based on family and Sunday worship.

In the late 1920s some degree of censorship was introduced to protect young Germans from exposure to pornography, and government spending on the expressive arts began to decrease. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 there was a dramatic end to free cultural expression and even the freedom of the individual. Many artists, musicians, writers, film directors and scientists, including Albert Einstein, left Germany for the United States.



Alamy Stock Photo/Peter Horree

Otto Dix, *Portrait of the journalist Sylvia von Harden* 1926. This stark expressionist portrait sought to convey realism as well as feeling and emotion. The portrait also symbolised the new liberated society and the modern woman in Weimar Germany. 'I must paint you. I simply must,' Dix said to von Harden. 'You are representative of an entire epoch!'. In Nazi Germany after 1933, this type of artistic expression was classed as degenerate art.



Women enjoyed new levels of freedom and equality during the Weimar era.

Women in Weimar Germany

During the period of the Weimar Republic, German women experienced an unprecedented degree of freedom and equality. German women had previously accepted the traditional role of wife and mother. They had no political rights and were expected to follow a very restricted lifestyle under the guidance of their fathers or husbands.

In Weimar Germany women were given full equality, and a new openness and tolerance allowed many women, particularly younger women, to experience a sense of freedom and liberation. Women also joined the workforce, and by 1925 some 35 per cent of German workers were women. They were free to adopt

new styles of dress and behaviour and also enjoyed greater sexual freedom. *The Law for Combating Venereal Diseases* (1927) decriminalised prostitution, and women had greater access to certain contraceptives as the ban on these items was relaxed. Many women excelled, particularly in the arts and entertainment industry.

The new Weimar constitution gave women the right to vote, and political parties began to promote policies that would be supported by women. In fact, in the first election of 1919, more women voted than men, though this may be linked to the 2 million young men who had been killed in World War I and the 2 million more who had been injured.

Working-class women tended to support the SPD, middle-class women initially supported the DDP, the DVP and the DNVP, and from the 1930s a significant portion of the Nazi vote came from middle-class and rural women. But despite their involvement, and the election of women to the German Reichstag, the reality was that women had little influence on the political process. The Nazi party actually promoted policies to end the emancipation and freedoms women enjoyed, and when the party came to power after 1933 these policies were put in place.

There were many 'new women', who were liberated from the traditional ideal of motherhood and family devotion. They included women who, with their newfound independent income, were able to indulge in the latest fashions, smoke cigarettes and enjoy the excitement of the cinemas, theatres, nightclubs and cafes of the big cities. However, women's wages remained well below those of men, and despite the increased sexual freedom, abortion remained illegal unless the mother's life was in danger.

While some German women did enjoy the new freedoms and opportunities available to them, the great majority were still influenced by the traditional view of women in society, taking care of home, husband and children. Historical research on the role of women in Weimar Germany has suggested that the level of women's emancipation may have been more in appearance than reality. There was still a clear focus on the differing roles and expectations of men and women.



Women in Weimar Germany

Science and technology

The cultural outpouring of the Weimar Republic took place against a background of scientific and technological advances. Germany had the most educated population in Europe, and science and technology flourished in the 1920s. German scientists won seven Nobel prizes during the decade, and the most famous scientist of the era, 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, flourished, boasting such achievements as the development of the Mercedes and the BMW.

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, hydrogen-filled airship made crossings to the United States and South America, and on one occasion flew around the world. Another German airship was the ill-fated *Hindenburg*. Built in 1936, it was destroyed by fire while attempting a landing in the United States in 1937.



imagefolk/Mary Evans Picture Library/The Royal Aeronautical Society

The German airship *Graf Zeppelin*, the largest airship of its time, was launched in 1928. It was the first airship to fly around the world.

HISTORICAL DEBATE: THE NATURE OF WEIMAR CULTURE OF THE 1920S

This brilliant but brief period when Germany became the world centre of creative ideas and art has attracted the attention of numerous historians, who have sought to explain its causes and effects.

The historian Paul Johnson suggests that this sudden outpouring of cultural expression had been building up since the nineteenth century. In Germany, ideas had always been highly valued and it was the political system and the rigid class divisions that restrained the full flowering of these creative forces. With the war and the subsequent defeat, German society changed as class divisions began to break down. The new constitution made Weimar Germany a more tolerant society, as freedoms were guaranteed and censorship was abolished. The historian Peter Gay, in his study *Weimar Culture* (1968), suggests something similar – that German society after 1918 provided the opportunity for many who had previously been ‘outsiders’ to gain acceptance.

There is also no doubt that the cultural freedom of the Weimar Republic divided German society, creating a clash of values between the old and the new. The new freedoms of cultural expression upset a large portion of the population, to the point that, as historian Eberhard Kolb suggests in *The Weimar Republic* (1988), there was a great divide between artistic groups and everyday Germans, who found the new freedom of cultural expression unacceptable. Millions of others were simply not affected. Conflict developed between those Germans who embraced innovative cultural change and the great majority of Germans, who could not.

The German historian Detlev Peukert, in his book *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (1987), suggests that Weimar Germany represented modernity in many aspects of German life, including cultural expression and the social and political changes of the time. This modernity led to very different reactions from different groups in German society. The major urban centres promoted and accepted modernity, while conservatives and, in particular, Germans in rural communities rejected it, adding to the division and stress in German society.

The daring and confronting nature of this new style upset many conservatives. They saw Weimar culture as degenerate or superficial, and as a challenge to Germany’s cultural past. They rejected the emancipation of women and the many new forms of artistic expression. For many Germans it was yet another reason to be less accepting of the Weimar Republic. To some, particularly on the right, this new, unacceptable culture was a reflection on the government that had allowed it to flourish. The Nazis in particular became violently opposed to the modernism of the Weimar era. Ultimately, they would define their own culture for the German people. It is not surprising that many who had been part of the cultural life of Germany in the 1920s were forced to leave the country when the Nazis came to power in the 1930s.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC

- ◆ The period of the Weimar Republic saw a remarkable upsurge of cultural life in Germany. A particular feature of this time was the sudden outpouring of new creative expression.
- ◆ Modernism and expressionism were two of the key themes of this new culture.
- ◆ This new cultural life was seen in film, music, theatre, architectural design and lifestyles.
- ◆ The Weimar era also saw significant German advances in science and technology.
- ◆ Women achieved a new level of freedom in Weimar Germany.
- ◆ The social changes in Weimar Germany were not welcomed by all Germans. Many opposed the new expression of freedom and change.
- ◆ Today, this cultural creativity is the feature most remembered from the Weimar era.

- 1 Explain why Weimar Germany became the centre of this unique period of new creative cultural expression in art, music and cinema.
- 2 Explain the meaning of the following terms as they relate to cultural life in Weimar Germany.

i cabaret	iii expressionism
ii modernism	iv the Bauhaus movement
- 3 Select three examples of the artwork of either Otto Dix or George Grosz and explain why a conservative might find the art works objectionable.
- 4 Identify the main changes to the lives of women in the period of the Weimar Republic.

4.3

GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920S

Stresemann and foreign policy to 1929

After Stresemann ceased to be chancellor in November 1923, he became foreign minister in the new government, a position he held 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 set realistic goals for his foreign policy:

- ◆ He believed that the way ahead for Germany was not through continued resistance to Germany's former enemies, but rather, by coming to terms with them, particularly France.
- ◆ Since Germany had no military capacity, it was necessary to cooperate with the West, ending Germany's isolation, and then use the country's economic potential to negotiate further changes.
- ◆ He believed that Germany could recover its place in the world through peaceful negotiation, and he sought to restore Germany as a great and respected European power. Stresemann was a diplomat of great skill and ability, and he sought to achieve these goals through careful and patient diplomacy.
- ◆ He aimed to end Germany's diplomatic isolation 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.

The Locarno Treaty, 1925

Stresemann enjoyed immediate success with the Dawes Plan in 1924, which moderated reparations and set the foundation for economic recovery. In 1925, sensing that the time was ripe for an improvement in relations between Germany and its traditional enemy, France, Stresemann proposed a new understanding with the old enemy. The new French foreign minister, Aristide Briand, was a genuine supporter of this new relationship, and the result was the **Locarno Treaty**, signed between France, Germany, Belgium, Britain and Italy in October 1925. The treaty guaranteed the French–German and German–Belgian borders, and France, Germany and Belgium renounced the use of war in the future. Despite protests from right-wing groups who condemned the Locarno Treaty, Germany lost nothing by signing the treaty.

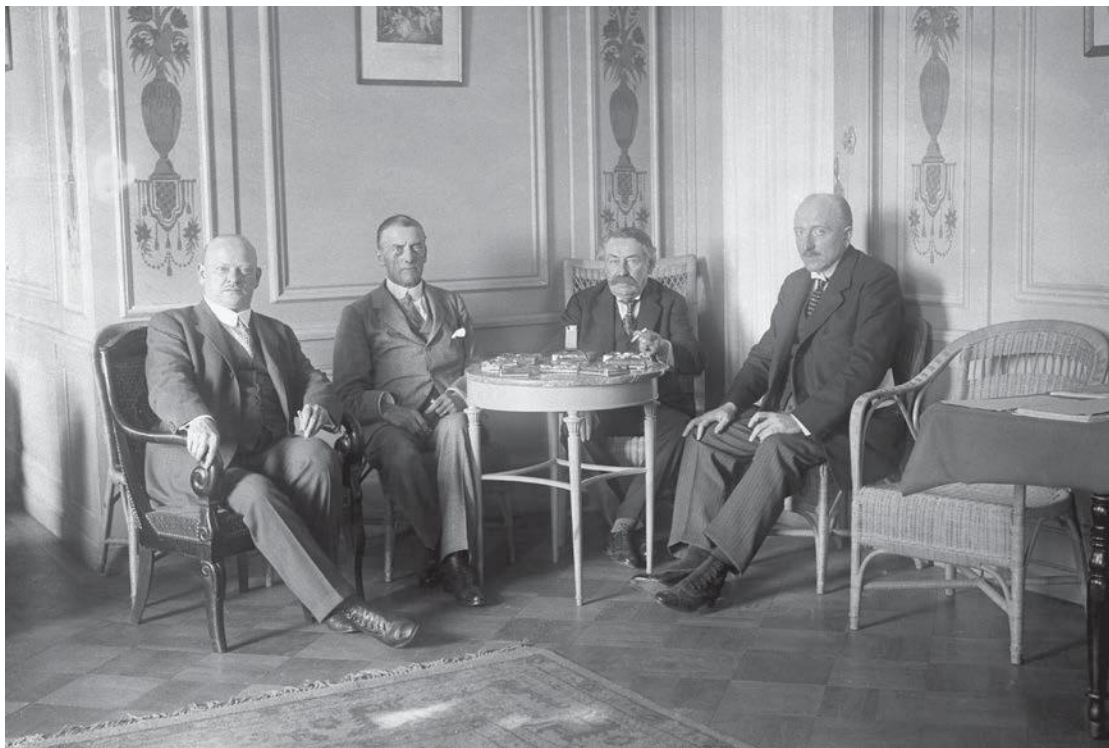
The Locarno Treaty marked a new beginning in European relations. For the first time since the war, Germany had been treated as an equal, and there was a new spirit of reconciliation in the air. The treaty gave the French an added sense of security, but it also added to German security, since France would never again occupy German territory. ‘At Locarno we spoke European,’ said Aristide Briand. ‘It is a new language that we certainly ought to learn.’⁵



The Treaty of Locarno, 1925

Germany joins the League of Nations

Amid this new spirit of friendship and reconciliation, Germany was admitted as a member of the League of Nations in 1926. Stresemann also insisted Germany be acknowledged as one of the major powers and a member of the Council of the League (along with Britain, France, Italy and Japan). Many Germans were opposed to Germany joining the League, since the organisation had been formed by the victorious powers who had imposed the Treaty of Versailles on Germany. But Stresemann believed the League was important, because it gave Germany an added voice in world affairs and a forum from which Germany could seek to settle other grievances.



Getty Images/Bettmann

Gustav Stresemann (left) with the British foreign secretary Austen Chamberlain, the French foreign minister Aristide Briand and Carl von Schubert from the German Foreign Ministry at the Locarno Conference, 1925

Germany and eastern Europe

Weimar Germany was also seeking to build a better relationship with the Soviet Union, and in 1922, under foreign minister Walther Rathenau, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Treaty of Rapallo. At that time both Germany and the Soviet Union were still very much excluded from the international community, and both nations gained benefits from the treaty. Germany recognised the Soviet Union as a nation, and was given favourable trade agreements in Russia. A secret part of the treaty also allowed Germany to train troops in the Soviet Union, and to build aeroplane factories, and later tank factories as well. This enabled Germany to get around some of the military restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles.

As foreign minister, Stresemann not only sought to build a better relationship with the West but also had a set of goals concerning eastern Europe. As a nationalist he wished to see the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, taken from Germany in 1919. He was determined to pursue his goals realistically and by diplomatic means. Four years later, in 1926, Stresemann negotiated the Treaty of Berlin with Russia, which reaffirmed the Treaty of Rapallo and provided for neutrality in the event of an attack on either country by a third party.

The Young Plan

Stresemann's final foreign policy success came with the **Young Plan** in 1929. The Young Plan followed the earlier work of the Dawes Plan, and set out to revise the reparation issue. The Young Plan reduced the final reparation figure from the original 132 000 million marks to 37 000 million marks, with arrangements that it be paid in annual instalments to the year 1988. In fact, the reparations were cancelled altogether a few years later when the Great Depression began.

An assessment of Gustav Stresemann

Stresemann's achievements, both as chancellor and as foreign minister, made him one of the most important figures of the Weimar Republic. His policies began Germany's economic recovery, and through his skilful diplomacy he restored the country 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 Gustav Stresemann died in 1929 the British Ambassador in Berlin, Lord D'Abernon, wrote, 'As one who knew him well through difficult years, who saw him triumph over grave opposition from without and from within, I hold that Germany has never had a wiser or a more courageous adviser'.⁶ Not everyone agreed, however, and in the years that followed, the Nazis, who hated Stresemann's policy of reconciliation and fulfilment, erased all reference to him.

There is still debate among historians about the role and achievements of Stresemann.

- ◆ After World War II most historians saw Stresemann as a 'good European', who believed in European cooperation and reconciliation and worked with other European states to achieve stability and peace.
- ◆ The most recent research, based on Stresemann's own papers and his diaries, suggests that Stresemann may not have been an internationalist or a 'good European' but that he remained a nationalist and an opportunist, seeking to achieve through clever diplomacy what mattered for Germany: the end of the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, the adjustment of Germany's eastern borders and the revival of Germany as an economic and political force in Europe.
- ◆ Stresemann was more a 'good German' than a 'good European', because he was at heart a nationalist determined to reassert Germany's position as a great power. The German historian Eberhard Kolb in *The Weimar Republic* (1988) calls Stresemann a 'calculating realist, nationalist and power politician ... no different in that respect from other European statesmen of his time'.

Modern historians do not dispute Stresemann's importance in Weimar Germany, or that he was one of the few statesmen of the time. As chancellor, he supported policies that resolved the Ruhr occupation, ended the hyperinflation and, with initiatives like the Dawes Plan, reduced reparations and set the foundation for a period of economic recovery. Despite these achievements, some historians believe that Stresemann's policies failed to strengthen the Weimar Republic. His policy of reconciliation and peaceful compromise caused division in the nation; while the economic stability after 1924 was a consequence of his policies, this economic progress was in reality based on very weak foundations.

THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR REMEMBERS STRESEMANN

Viscount D'Abernon was the British Ambassador to Germany from 1920–1926 and a friend of Gustav Stresemann. The extract below comes from his published diaries.

Stresemann may claim to have raised Germany from the position of a stricken and disarmed foe into that of a diplomatic equal, entitled to a full consideration as a great power. To have accomplished this in a few years of power without the support of armed force is a feat worthy of those who have written their name most memorably on the scroll of fame ...

Edgar D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace: Pages from the Diary of Viscount D'Abernon*,
Watt & Son, London, 1929, p. 290.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what the British Ambassador, Viscount D'Abernon, believed was Stresemann's greatest achievement.
- 2 Can we regard the ambassador as an objective (fair) observer of events and personalities in the 1920s? Justify your answer

In his own lifetime Stresemann faced hostile critics. Right-wing groups like the German National People's Party (DNVP) and the Nazis believed that Stresemann had given in to the old enemy by making arrangements like Locarno and joining the League of Nations. Stresemann's cautious policy did not please the army or its leader, General von Seeckt, who remained a vocal opponent of Stresemann and his policies. Many in the army believed that Germany, with its ally Russia, should take action to resolve the problem of Poland and regain territory that both countries lost to the new Polish state. Stresemann wanted to revise the eastern border with Poland, but not through force. After negotiating the Young Plan, Stresemann faced new attacks. Despite the fact that he had negotiated lower reparations, he came under attack for failing to end reparations altogether.

Looking back on Weimar

For many years there was a tendency to see the Weimar era merely as a prelude to the Nazi era, but 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. They have also addressed key questions about the Weimar Republic:

- ◆ Were the republic and German democracy doomed from the start?
- ◆ Did the democracy have a chance but collapse in the face of continued challenges, including the Depression and the Nazi movement?
- ◆ If the republic was doomed to fail, was Nazism the inevitable replacement?

Evaluating the Weimar Republic

Assess 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 the long-term outlook for its continued survival was positive.

The case in favour:

- ◆ Germany had finally established a democratic system with a constitution that guaranteed the basic rights of the German people.
- ◆ The government had survived the attacks to the democratic system by the extreme left and the extreme right.
- ◆ The election of 1928 saw a drop in support for the political parties that opposed the democracy.
- ◆ The nation had overcome the challenge of hyperinflation and established a real level of economic growth by the mid-1920s.
- ◆ Significant progress had been achieved in social welfare measures, with a particular improvement in conditions for the working class.
- ◆ The reparations burden had been reduced through skilful negotiation and diplomacy.
- ◆ Germany had been accepted back into the European community after signing the Locarno Treaty, and as a member of the League of Nations.
- ◆ Germany had become a world centre for modernism and new forms of creative cultural life.
- ◆ Germany had a worldwide reputation for its excellence in science and learning.
- ◆ The election of Paul von Hindenburg as president in 1925 influenced many conservatives who had previously opposed the republic to support it now.

The case against:

- ◆ There were still strong nationalist emotions about the way Germany had been treated after World War I. The issue of the Treaty of Versailles was unresolved.
- ◆ Heavy dependence on foreign loans that financed much of the economic growth meant that the German economy was very vulnerable to world economic forces.
- ◆ Democracy survived, but the political system was still very volatile, with many political parties, shifting coalitions and six changes of government in the 'good years' of 1924–1928.
- ◆ The army remained a force with great influence on the government and the political system. All Weimar governments had to consider the position of the military and its reaction to any government policy.
- ◆ Although the German economy grew after 1924, Germany's industrial growth was slower than that of Britain and France. By 1927 Germany's industrial growth had only just met the pre-war level of 1913. Unemployment also remained relatively high.
- ◆ The modernism of the time was not acceptable to all Germans, and many were alienated by the rate of change in the Weimar Republic, causing division in German society.
- ◆ There remained in the German political system two extremist parties that were both pledged to overthrow the system – the KPD on the extreme left and the Nazis on the extreme right.

Many historians have argued that the Weimar Republic suffered from a number of structural weaknesses from the start, and that the failure of German democracy was, in a sense, inevitable. These structural weaknesses include the authoritarian tradition in German history, the lack of a democratic tradition, weaknesses in the constitutional and party system, the role of privileged groups and the army, who maintained their influence in the republic, and the fact that, from the start, the republic suffered setbacks and was unable to gain legitimate acceptance.

Among the historians who have placed great importance on these structural weaknesses are two of the most respected German scholars, Karl Dietrich Bracher, who wrote *The German Dictatorship*

(1978) and Eberhard Kolb, who wrote *The Weimar Republic* (1988). Although, as we have seen, the republic overcame early challenges to its survival, fundamental problems remained, even during the so-called good years from 1924 to 1929. As a result, the republic was vulnerable and therefore could not 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 agree that the republic was doomed from the start, believing there was absolutely nothing inevitable about Hitler and the Nazis coming to power. Between 1924 and 1929, the Weimar Republic appeared to have overcome its 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.

These historians believe that, without the Depression, the republic and German democracy would at least have had a chance. If German democracy had survived, there would have been no Hitler, and world history would have been very different.

The key to the failure of Weimar may be found in the weakened democracy, the political unrest, and finally the Depression, which generated economic distress. There is no doubt that the Nazis gained strength and confidence from the political and economic crises after 1929.

The major democracies, including the United States, Britain and France, which all had a long experience of democracy, survived the crisis of the Depression with their political system intact. In Italy, democracy failed with the rise of Benito Mussolini’s fascist government after 1922, and democracy went on to fail in many central European states where democratic systems had been established after World War I. German democracy, effectively imposed by the victorious powers as a requirement for the peace in 1918, could have survived, but in the end the country 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 true 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.

REVIEW OF DETLEV PEUKERT’S *THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: THE CRISIS OF CLASSICAL MODERNITY*

The Weimar Republic was the epilogue to one tragedy, the prologue to another ... Born amid the despair of German defeat in World War I, the new constitutional order was a burst of righteous anger against an obsolete monarchy and outmoded values and a fervent expression of faith in a new order. Its failure would be freighted with the terrible burden of having ushered in the Third Reich.

The period has long been celebrated for its modernism, its restless experimentation in arts and letters. The abrupt demise of inherited beliefs created a vacuum in which old inhibitions vanished and forbidden thoughts and feelings surfaced. Meanwhile, so many new economic and social institutions emerged as to form a virtual laboratory for the coming century.

For Peukert, the Weimar Republic wasn’t an embarrassing disgrace but a brave failure, crushed beneath the weight of economic crises that would have destroyed even more solid regimes. ‘Perhaps the miracle of Weimar is that the Republic—despite a never-ending series of greater and lesser crises ... actually survived as long as it did,’ he writes. The hyper-inflation

and reparations had especially dire effects, he argues, because the Weimar Constitution had enshrined the welfare state. It granted citizens not only political freedoms but also economic expectations and social entitlements. The crisis of the welfare state led to the republic's loss of political legitimacy.

Peukert shows that the Nazis stepped into the political vacuum of the failed Weimar experiment, but didn't bring it about. Demoralized and divided after the crisis-ridden years, the German people turned to a charismatic Führer as their last hope. The Nazis' predecessors had trampled down all obstacles in the Weimar landscape, paving the way for their triumphant entry.

Ron Chernow, 'A Bridge Between Chasms: *THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*',
by Detlev JK Peukert, *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1992.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the meaning of the statement 'The Weimar Republic was the epilogue to one tragedy, the prologue to another'.
- 2 Prepare a summary of the main points made in this book review.

The Weimar era stands as a distinct era in German history. It was a time when Germans embraced a true democracy and then faced the constant challenges of making it work. There were the ever-present tensions in German society, the political divisions and the powerful impact of social change. Turbulent economic forces battered the republic at its beginning and towards its close, and for a brief period the republic was given a glimpse of prosperity and hope. Finally, as the war years faded, there was the German struggle to regain equality in postwar Europe. By any measure, the Weimar Republic remains one of the most creative and critical periods of modern world history.

GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1920S

- ◆ Germany enjoyed a period of relative economic recovery and political stability between 1924 and 1928.
- ◆ The Locarno Treaty, signed in 1925, ended much of the bitterness of the Treaty of Versailles and allowed Germany to re-enter the European community on an equal footing and gain membership of the League of Nations.
- ◆ As foreign minister, Stresemann also developed a more positive relationship with Russia, Germany's former enemy in the east.
- ◆ The Young Plan of 1929 was a significant step in reducing the reparations burden for Germany.
- ◆ Stresemann's death in 1929, just weeks before the onset of the Great Depression, was a blow to the democratic forces in Germany. Historians have speculated as to whether Germany's path through the Great Depression may have been different if a man of Stresemann's skill had still been in government in the early 1930s.

- 1 Place these events in chronological order:
 Germany joined the League of Nations
 Hindenburg became President of Germany
 Stresemann became German foreign minister
 Treaty of Locarno is signed
 Treaty of Rapallo is signed
 The Young Plan is signed
- 2 Prepare two lists, with the headings 'The goals of Gustav Stresemann as foreign minister' and 'The achievements of Gustav Stresemann as foreign minister'.
 To each of the lists, add what you believe to be the relevant historical evidence appropriate to each heading.
- 3 Essay question: To what extent was the Weimar Republic doomed from the start? Refer to the work of at least one historian to support your answer.

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 How successful was Stresemann in dealing with the problems faced by the Weimar Republic in the years 1924–1929?
- 2 'Gustav Stresemann was the only prominent political figure to emerge in Germany during the 1920s. His impact, however, was less prominent.' Do you agree with this assessment?

Endnotes

- 1 Gustav Stresemann, *Vermachtnis*, Verlag Ullstein, Berlin, 1932, p. 385.
- 2 Knut Borchardt, *Perspectives on Modern German Economic History and Policy*, translated by Peter Lambert, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1991, p. 179.
- 3 Viscount Edgar D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace*, Watt & Son, London, 1929, p. 115.
- 4 Yehudi Menuhin quoted in Otto Friedrich, *Before the Deluge: A Portrait of Berlin in the 1920s*, Harper Row, New York, 1972, p. 12.
- 5 Quoted in S King-Hall, *Our Own Times*, Nicolson & Watson, London, 1938, p. 83.
- 6 Edgar D'Abernon, *An Ambassador of Peace*, p. 290.

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC 1919–1929

- 1 Create a graph of the period 1919–1929 using two axes. Place the events below in their correct positions on the horizontal time line and on the vertical line indicate if the event as either a HIGH point in the history of Weimar Germany or a LOW point in the history of Weimar Germany.
 - i Reichstag elections 1928
 - ii The Dawes Plan
 - iii The Kapp Putsch
 - iv French occupation of the Ruhr
 - v Introduction of the Rentenmark
 - vi The Locarno Treaty
 - vii Assassination of Walther Rathenau
 - viii The Spartacist Revolt
 - ix German hyperinflation
 - x Germany joins the League of Nations
 - xi Paul von Hindenburg elected president
 - xii The Young Plan

Explain any pattern you see emerging from the placements.
- 2 Research the developments in German filmmaking during the Weimar period. Write a movie review on a film made during this time.
- 3 Prepare one side for the debate: ‘Stresemann was more a “good German” than a “good European”.’
- 4 Create a mind map about social, political and economic problems in Germany 1918–1929. Make sure you include the causes and how they were being dealt with.
- 5 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 the long-term outlook for its continued survival was positive.’
- 6 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 soup kitchen in Germany during the Great Depression, providing food for the unemployed and homeless

Germany 1929–1934: The rise of the Nazi Party and the failure of German democracy

CHAPTER 5

ADOLF HITLER AND THE NAZI PARTY

CHAPTER 6

THE FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY: THE NAZIS COME TO POWER

CHAPTER 7

ESTABLISHING THE TOTALITARIAN STATE: GERMANY 1933–1934

CHAPTER 5

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party

5.1

ADOLF HITLER

5.2

THE BEGINNING OF
THE NAZI PARTY

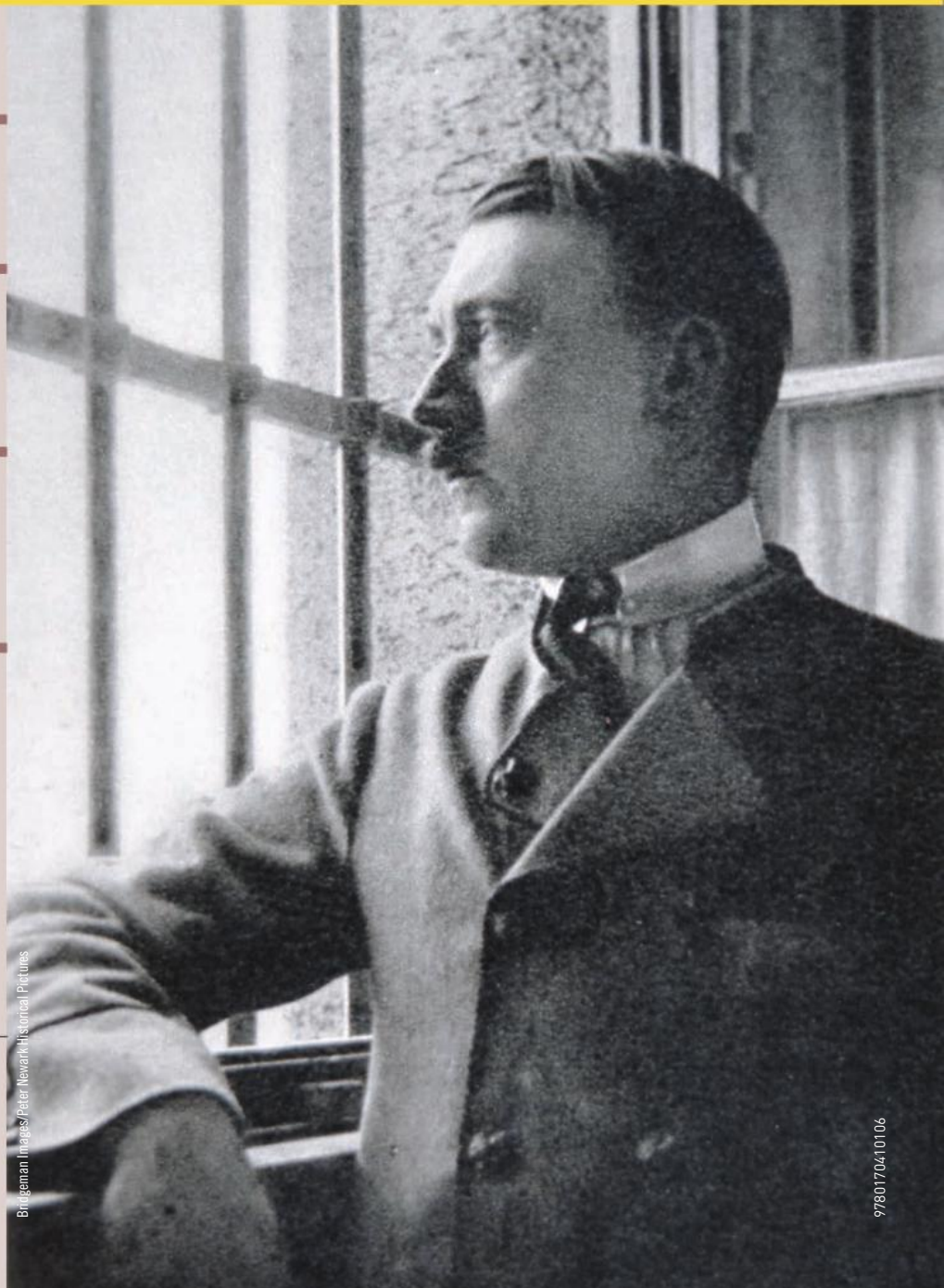
5.3

THE MUNICH BEER HALL
PUTSCH, 1923

5.4

REBUILDING THE PARTY,
1923–1929

Adolf Hitler, aged 35, pictured
in his cell at Landsberg
prison in 1924.



Brigman Images/Peter Newark Historical Pictures

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

anti-Semitism

An attitude or action that is anti-Jewish.

Aryan

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

demagogue

A person who gains popular support by appealing to prejudices rather than using rational argument.

National Socialism (or Nazism)

The doctrine and policies of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, which ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. The German name was *National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (NSDAP). The term 'Nazi' is derived from this.

pan-Germanism

A nationalist doctrine aiming to unite all German-speaking peoples under German rule. The Nazi Party embraced the idea of pan-Germanism.

Social Darwinism

A philosophy, derived from Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which suggested that the rules of nature, where the strong prevail over the weak, could also apply to human society, and that superior races would prevail over inferior races.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party to 1928



TIMELINE

5.1

ADOLF HITLER

Adolf Hitler's early life

Adolf Hitler, the dominant political figure in Germany in the twentieth century, was born in the small Austrian town of Braunau on 20 April 1889. In his book *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*), published in 1925, Hitler suggested that his family was poor and that his boyhood was a time of hardship. In fact, he came from a middle-class family that was comfortably off by the standards of the day. His father, Alois Hitler, was a customs official with the Austrian civil service, and was well over 50 when Hitler was born. His mother, Klara, was a former servant girl who became Alois Hitler's third wife.

The young Hitler had ability but performed poorly at school. He reacted against discipline and the conformity of school life. 'What gave me pleasure I learned,' he later wrote, '... what seemed to me unimportant or was otherwise unattractive to me I sabotaged completely.'¹ One of his teachers described Hitler as 'wilful, arrogant, and bad tempered. He had obvious difficulty in fitting in at school. Moreover he was lazy ... he demanded of his fellow pupils their unqualified subservience, fancying himself in the role of leader'.²

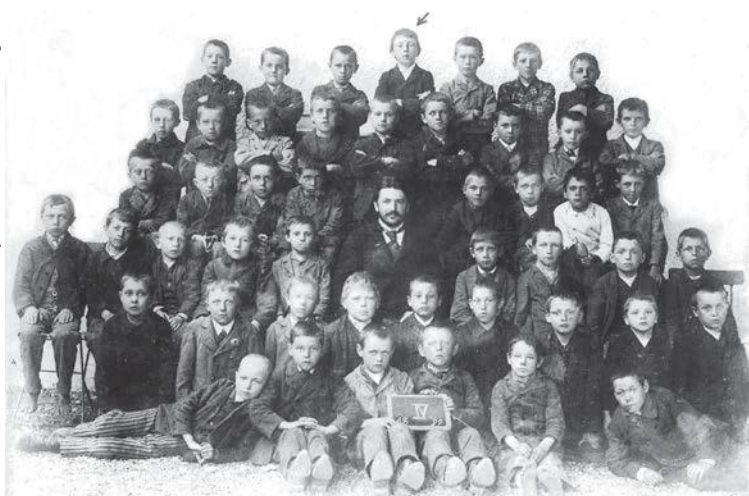
Hitler had a poor relationship with his stern and inflexible father, who could not accept his son's lack of self-discipline or his growing interest in art, architecture and music. When Alois died in 1903, Klara Hitler had very little control over her headstrong son, and in 1905, aged 15, Hitler left school altogether. Two years later he applied to enter the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, but his test drawings were unsatisfactory and his application was rejected. Later that year Hitler suffered another blow with the death of his mother. He had been devoted to her, and her death from cancer at the age of 47 affected him deeply. Hitler carried a portrait of her with him for the rest of his life.

In 1908 Hitler moved to Vienna, the capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and one of the great cultural centres of Europe. Here his artistic interests were well served by the cultural life of the city, with its art galleries, splendid architecture and its great traditions of music and opera. The music of the composer Richard Wagner, with its heroic themes of German legend, moved him deeply. Once again he sought admission to the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts, but once again he was rejected.

For a time Hitler had sufficient funds from his inheritance and from an orphan's pension to live in furnished rooms, but by 1910, now aged 21, he was almost destitute, and was forced to live

at a shelter for homeless men. Occasionally he made some money from drawing sketches or painting scenes of old Vienna, but he refused to seek a settled job. He remained unemployed and almost unemployable, and sank into a lonely, aimless existence. It was a time that Hitler himself later described as the most miserable period of his life.

By 1910 Hitler had begun to show an interest in politics. He spent hours in public libraries reading on a variety of topics that excited his interest, and engaged in political discussion and argument in the working men's cafes and coffee houses that he frequented. August Kubizek, one of the few people who knew Hitler at this time, wrote that, 'he was at odds with the world,



This class photo of Year IV in 1899 shows Hitler as a schoolboy, aged 10 years (top row, fourth from left).

wherever he looked he saw injustice, hate, enmity. Nothing was free from criticism, nothing found favour in his eyes.⁷³

To a degree, Hitler's views of the world were shaped during this time. His time in Vienna confirmed his belief in **pan-Germanism**, the idea that all Germanic peoples should be united into a large German state. His belief that struggle was a core feature of life also took shape on the cold backstreets of Vienna. There was a strong element of **anti-Semitism** in Viennese society at this time, and while there is little doubt that Hitler came into contact with anti-Semitic ideas during these early years, his future virulent hatred of the Jews did not emerge until later in the 1920s.

THE YOUNG HITLER

SOURCE A: Descriptions of the young Hitler by the historian Konrad Heiden

He wore an ancient black overcoat which had been given to him by an old-clothes dealer in the hostel, a Hungarian Jew named Neumann, and which reached down over his knees. From under a greasy black derby hat, his hair hung long over his coat collar. His thin and hungry face was covered with a black beard above which his large staring eyes were the one prominent feature ... over and over again there were days on which he simply refused to work. Then he would hang around night shelters, living on the bread and soup he got there and discussing politics, often getting involved in heated controversies.

Konrad Heiden, *Der Führer*, Houghton Mifflin Boston, 1944, pp. 61–62.

SOURCE B: Descriptions of the young Hitler by his friend August Kubizek

In his countenance the eyes were so outstanding that one didn't notice anything else. Never in my life have I seen any other person whose appearance was so completely dominated by the eyes ... he spoke with his eyes and even when his lips were silent one knew what he wanted to say. When he first came to our house and I introduced him to my mother she said to me in the evening 'What eyes your friend has!' And I remember quite distinctly that there was more fear than admiration in her word.

August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew*, Popper, London, 1954, p. 18.

SOURCE C: From the historian Volker Ullrich

Hitler seems to have shared some of the anti-Semitic prejudices and clichés that abounded in German nationalist circles, but he was a long way from being a paranoid Jew-hatred that would become the centrepiece of his political activity ... Hitler was anything but a finished product by the end of his Vienna years. He would have to have further dramatic life-changing experiences before he became an obsessive anti-Semitic **demagogue** lecturing in Munich's beer halls.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, p. 45.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Give a short quote from Source B that supports a claim in Source A.
- 2 With specific reference to at least one source, what was the young Hitler's situation during this time in Vienna before World War I?
- 3 What does Source C suggest about Hitler's anti-Semitism?



Hitler as artist



Alamy Stock Photo/World History Archive

A watercolour by Hitler of the courtyard in the Old Residency in Munich, painted just before the outbreak of war in 1914. Hitler displayed some ability as an architectural painter, but had trouble drawing the human figure.

In 1913 Hitler left Vienna and moved across the border to Munich, the capital of the German state of Bavaria. He was living in Munich in 1914 when World War I broke out, and, although not a German citizen, he sought permission to join the German army. His request was granted and in August 1914 he became a member of the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. 'I was carried away by enthusiasm,' Hitler later wrote. 'I sank down upon my knees and thanked Heaven out of the fullness of my heart for having been permitted to live in such a time.'⁴



Imagefolk/World History Archive

A crowd in the Odeonsplatz in Munich cheering the declaration of war on 2 August 1914. A young Hitler, then totally unknown, is part of the crowd.

Hitler the soldier

Hitler served in the German army throughout all of World War I. Although he may have later exaggerated his wartime experiences, there seems little doubt that he was a loyal and conscientious soldier. Hitler's unit first saw battle in October 1914 during the First Battle of Ypres in Flanders (Belgium), where his regiment suffered heavy losses. The following month he was promoted to private first class and appointed a dispatch runner, responsible for taking orders from the regimental headquarters up to the frontline. He never complained about the hardship or conditions and never sought leave. He displayed courage under fire and in December 1914 was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class. It was, he wrote in a letter, 'the happiest day of my life ... of course almost all of my comrades who deserved one too are dead'.⁵

In October 1916 he was wounded when a shell exploded near the dispatch runners' trench, and had to return to Germany for medical treatment, but he was keen to get back to the front and was back in the fighting line by March 1917. Hitler identified with the German army and it provided support and security he had never known. Amid the death, hardship and suffering of the trenches he had found a home. 'The war,' he later wrote, was 'the greatest and most unforgettable time of my life.'⁶



Hitler and World War I

HITLER THE SOLDIER

SOURCE A

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. During World War Two his Alsatian Blondi would again offer him the nearest thing he could find for friendship ... About the war itself Hitler was utterly fanatical. His comrades knew that they could always provoke Hitler with defeatist comments. All they had to do was claim the war was lost and Hitler would go off the deep end.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, pp. 92–93.

SOURCE B

Hitler felt more comfortable in the exclusively male world of the regiment than in civilian society and his experiences of war would determine his views on military hierarchies and greatly influence the organizational structure of the NSDAP (Nazi Party) ... (it was) a life governed by discipline and order. He seems not to have had much difficulty integrating into the system of command and obedience. Hitler behaved obediently even subserviently towards his superiors. He took no part in the crude amusements and coarse jokes of his comrades, and he remained an outsider among them. In the photographs that survive of this period, he appears on the margins, an extremely thin figure with a fixed almost stony stare. When he does put his arm around one of his comrades, the gesture feels artificial and alien.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler, Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016. p. 62.

SOURCE C



Hitler (on right) and his dog Foxl with wartime comrades at the Western Front in 1916

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are some of the benefits of using secondary sources written by historians?
- 2 Why would Source A be useful to a historian studying Hitler's service in World War I? In your answer, consider the nature of the source and the information it provides.
- 3 What is Ullrich's main argument in Source B?
- 4 What aspects of Hitler's life on the front are identified in both Source A and Source B?
- 5 Does Source C support or contradict evidence in Source B?

Hitler's regiment took part in the great Ludendorff offensive of March 1918. Although Hitler himself emerged unscathed, almost half of his regiment were either killed or wounded. In August that year, as the war moved into its final months, he was awarded the Iron Cross First Class 'for personal bravery and general merit', a rare honour for a corporal. Years later, when he was supreme master of Germany, his Iron Cross was the only military decoration he ever wore.

Hitler's war ended in October 1918 when he was caught in a mustard gas attack and partially blinded. Taken back to Germany to recover, it was in a hospital in Germany that he heard the news of the armistice and that the war was over. Like so many other brave soldiers, the shock of Germany's defeat had a profound impact on Hitler, and like many others he fervently believed that Germany had been betrayed. 'Everything went black before my eyes,' he later wrote, 'as I staggered back to my ward and buried my aching head between the blankets and the pillow ... during these nights my hatred increased, hatred for the originators of this dastardly crime.'⁷ According to Hitler's own testimony, it was at this point that he decided to become a politician.

ADOLF HITLER – HIS EARLY LIFE

- ◆ Hitler was born in Braunau, Austria, in 1889.
- ◆ He disliked school and the discipline of work and rebelled against authority.
- ◆ He wished to become an artist, but failed to gain entry to art school and instead drifted into a lonely and aimless existence in Vienna from 1907 to 1913.
- ◆ Hitler moved to Germany in 1913 and joined the German army at the outbreak of war in August 1914.
- ◆ Throughout World War I Hitler served bravely on the Western Front. He was wounded twice and decorated twice.
- ◆ Germany's collapse in November 1918 affected him deeply. Like many Germans, he believed in the idea of 'the stab in the back', that Germany had been betrayed.

5.1 SUMMARY

1 Explain the meaning of the following terms.

- i pan-Germanism
- ii anti-Semitism

2 Hitler later claimed that World War I was 'the greatest and most unforgettable time of my life'.

Prepare an extended paragraph in which you recount:

- i what Hitler did during World War I
- ii how the war and its aftermath helped move Hitler into politics.

5.1 QUESTIONS

5.2

THE BEGINNING OF THE NAZI PARTY

The German Workers' Party

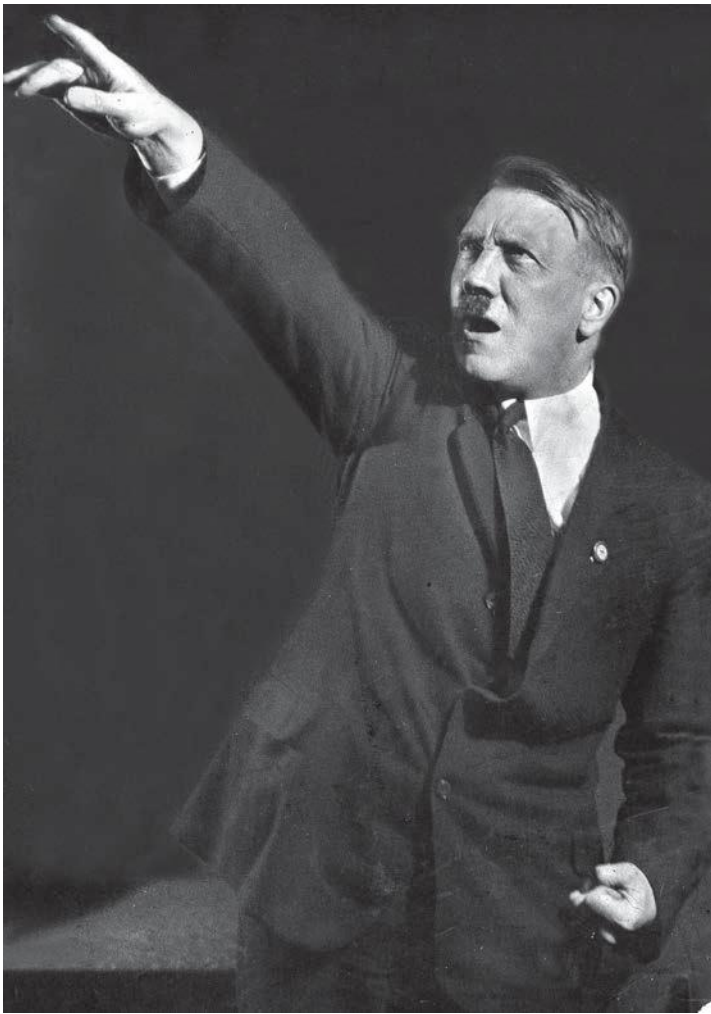
After the war, Hitler returned to Munich, one of hundreds of thousands of former soldiers disillusioned by Germany's surrender and facing an uncertain future in a country unsettled by revolution. He was luckier than many (indeed, luck often seemed to be on Hitler's side in his rise to power) and was made a political officer for the army. It was the first steady job he had ever had. One of his duties was to report to the army command in Bavaria on the small political parties that flourished in the state.

It was in this capacity that he attended a meeting of a small political group called the German Workers' Party in September 1919. This obscure group had been founded earlier that year by a Bavarian toolmaker, Anton Drexler. It had a confused political program and only 40 members when

Hitler attended this meeting in a back room of the Sternecker Brewery in Munich. On that particular evening the group was discussing the issue of Bavaria breaking away from the rest of Germany. With his deeply felt sense of nationalism, Hitler was vigorously opposed to the proposal. He was stirred to speak, and he made such an impact that a few days later Drexler invited him to join the party.

Hitler became party member no. 555. To give the impression that the party had a larger membership, its membership numbering began at 500. 'The party had no offices, no employees, no printed letterhead and not even a rubber stamp to its name. Its entire property consisted of an old briefcase in which the members kept correspondence and a battered cigar box containing the party's funds, a little over seven marks.'⁸ But Hitler had found what he had been looking for – a small political party that could become a forum for his own ideas and that he could shape. 'Only in a party which, like himself was beginning at the bottom had he any prospect of playing a leading part and imposing his ideas,' wrote the British historian Alan Bullock. 'In the established parties there was no room for him, he would be a nobody.'⁹

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; it was the first time the party had succeeded in attracting more than 100 people to a meeting. A few months later more than 2000 people crammed into the Hofbräuhaus, a



Hitler's style as an orator was the result of practice. This is one of a series of photos taken in the 1920s by Hitler's photographer, Heinrich Hoffman. Hitler worked on the techniques of movement and facial expression.

Munich beer hall, to hear this new voice. His speeches picked up on familiar themes: the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, the need for Germany to recover its inner strength, attacks on the democratic government and his public references to the Jews. Hitler's anti-Semitism had now taken form. He blamed the Jews for the German military defeat and for the revolution that followed. 'We refuse to tolerate our destiny being ruled by a foreign race,' he told a political meeting in January 1920, 'we demand a stop to Jewish immigration'.¹⁰ Through the force of his personality, his organisational skills and his brilliant capacity 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.

HITLER THE PUBLIC SPEAKER: AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT IN 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. His words were like a scourge. 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 Luedecke, *I Knew Hitler*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1937, p. 22.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what made the author of this extract so supportive of Hitler when he heard him speak.
- 2 Which of the following can be identified in the extract?

Anti-Semitism

Contempt for liberal democracy

Anti-communism

Opposition to the Treaty of Versailles

Extreme nationalism

Pan-Germanism

In February 1920, within a year of Hitler joining the German Workers' Party, the party changed its name to become the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*National Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*, NSDAP), or Nazi for short. To give the party a distinct identity it developed its own set of symbols and emblems, including the swastika, the party colours of black, red and white, and a distinctive party salute. The party also attracted increasing financial support and it was able to establish its own newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*.

The 25 Points

As the Nazi movement took shape it wanted to project itself as a party with a clear purpose or political program. In February 1920 the party published its 25 Point Program, a wide-ranging statement of what the Nazis stood for.



A Nazi Party membership badge with the distinctive swastika symbol

SUMMARY OF THE 25 POINT PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST GERMAN WORKERS' PARTY

1. We demand the unification of all Germans in the Greater Germany.
2. We demand equality of rights for the German people in respect to the other nations; abrogation (cancellation) of the peace Treaty of Versailles.
3. We demand land and territory to provide food and living space for our people.
4. Only a member of the race can be a citizen. A member of the race can only be one who is of German blood. No Jew can be a member of the nation.
5. Whoever has no citizenship is to be able to live in Germany only as a guest.
6. Only German citizens have the right to vote and to hold public positions.
7. We demand that the state be charged first with providing the opportunity for a livelihood and way of life for the citizens. If it is impossible to sustain the total population of the state, then the members of foreign nations (non-citizens) are to be expelled from Germany.
8. The immigration of non-Germans is to be prevented. We demand that all non-Germans, who have immigrated to Germany since 2 August 1914, be forced immediately to leave.
9. All citizens of the nation must have equal rights and obligations.
10. The first obligation of every citizen must be to work both spiritually and physically. Citizens work for the benefit of the nation.
11. We demand the abolition of unearned (work and labour) incomes.
12. We demand the total confiscation of all war profits.
13. We demand the nationalisation of all industries.
14. We demand a division of profits of all industries.
15. We demand an expansion on a large scale of old age welfare.
16. We demand the creation of a healthy middle class and its conservation.
17. We demand a land reform suitable to our needs ... abolition of taxes on land and prevention of all speculation in land.
18. We demand struggle without consideration against those whose activity is injurious to the general interest.
19. We demand substitution of a German common law in place of the Roman Law.
20. The state is to be responsible for a fundamental reconstruction of our whole national education program, to enable every capable and industrious German to obtain higher education.
21. The state is to care for the elevating national health by protecting the mother and child, by the encouragement of physical fitness, ... by the utmost support of all organisations concerned with the physical instruction of the young.
22. We demand the formation of a national army.
23. We demand the creation of a German national press. All writers and employees of the newspapers appearing in the German language be members of the race.
24. We demand freedom of religion for all religious denominations within the state ... The Party supports a positive Christianity. It combats the Jewish-materialistic spirit within and around us.



-
25. We demand the formation of a strong central power in the Reich. Unlimited authority of the central parliament over the whole Reich and its organisations in general. The leaders of the Party promise, if necessary by sacrificing their own lives, to support by the execution of the points set forth above without consideration.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Beside each clause of the 25 Point Program, identify whether the clause is nationalist, socialist and/or racist.
- 2 Prepare a list of groups in German society who would find something attractive in the ideas expressed in the 25 Points.
- 3 Using the source and your own knowledge, write an extended paragraph on the ideology of the NSDAP in the early 1920s.

By 1923, having been in existence for only a few years, **National Socialism** had emerged as a political movement in the form of the Nazi Party. Largely due to Hitler's drive and determination, the Nazi Party had more than 70 000 members and was a significant political force in Bavarian politics. Included in this membership were the 15 000 members of the Sturmabteilung, or SA.



25 Point Program

The stormtroopers (Sturmabteilung)

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 World War I, and many of them had been in the Freikorps formations that had played a role in German political life in the early 1920s. The Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment or stormtroopers, SA) developed from groups of ex-soldiers who were initially used to deal with those who sought to disrupt the early Nazi Party meetings.

Originally called the 'Gymnastic and Sports Division' of the party, by late 1921 the name Sturmabteilung had emerged. The SA became in effect the Nazi Party's own private army, and its membership grew rapidly. With its extreme right-wing views, its use of violence and its opposition to both the republic and communism, the Nazi Party attracted growing support from ex-Freikorps troops, many of them little more than thugs and street bullies. In their distinct 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. The SA was to be the 'battering ram' of the movement – in Hitler's words, 'not only an instrument for the protection of the movement but also primarily the training school for the coming struggle'.¹¹ Violent street battles between the SA and the supporters of other political groups, particularly the German Communist Party's equivalent, the *Der Rote Frontkämpferbund* (Red Front Fighter's



imagefolk/Mary Evans Picture Library

A parade of stormtroopers in the snow in Munich 1923. Their strong-armed tactics played an important role in helping the Nazi Party emerge from obscurity and ultimately come to power in 1933.

League), became a feature of political life. In October 1922 the Nazis participated in a 'German Day'. Arriving by special train, more than 800 SA members marched through the city of Coburg under the Nazi banner, provoking a major street battle with their opponents.

By 1923 SA membership had expanded to the point that it was placed under the command of Hermann Göring, who reorganised the force along military lines and brought some order to the organisation. Another of the leading figures in the early movement was Captain Ernst Röhm, who joined the party and brought considerable army backing to the movement.

5.2 SUMMARY

THE ORIGINS AND BELIEFS OF THE NAZIS

- ◆ In 1919 Hitler joined an unknown political group in Munich called the German Workers' Party.
- ◆ He quickly became the dominant influence in the party, and transformed it into the Nazi Party.
- ◆ In February 1920 the Nazis issued the 25 Point Program, a basic statement of what the Nazis believed. Parts of this program would change when the Nazis finally came to power.
- ◆ By 1923 the Nazi Party was a significant political group in Bavarian politics, with its own identity.
- ◆ Like other political parties, the Nazis had their own military wing, the Sturmabteilung or SA.

5.2 QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the photo of the Sturmabteilung (SA) or storm troopers suggest about the Nazi Party?
- 2 How did Göring and Röhm help shape the SA?
- 3 Explain why the SA was so important to the early Nazi Party.
- 4 Which Nazi symbols can be seen in the photo on page 111?
- 5 Why was the Nazi Party able to grow so quickly in the early 1920s?

5.3

THE MUNICH BEER HALL PUTSCH, 1923

Amid all the difficulties of 1923, the government in Berlin had lost its authority in the state of Bavaria. Furious at the ending of passive resistance in the Ruhr, the right-wing Bavarian government had declared its own state of emergency and demanded that Reichswehr (army) soldiers in Bavaria take an oath of loyalty to Bavaria rather than to the Republic. Bavaria was in fact ruled by three men – the Prime Minister, Gustav von Kahr, the commander of the army in Bavaria, General von Lossow, and the Bavarian Chief of Police, Hans von Seisser. However, there were other powerful elements at work in the state, including the Kampfbund (Fighting League), an organisation set up in 1923 that represented the major right-wing military groups.

The Nazi movement was part of the Kampfbund, and Hitler was one of the organisation's prominent leaders. The Kampfbund also included as a figurehead a former World War I commander, General von Ludendorff. There is no doubt that Kahr and others were conspiring against the Stresemann government in Berlin, but by November 1923, despite the rumours, nothing had happened, and indeed the tensions between Bavaria and Berlin had begun to ease.



placeholder photo acknowledgement

The Bürgerbräukeller in Munich, scene of the 1923 Beer Hall Putsch

In November 1923, when it appeared that the Bavarian government was wavering in its opposition to the Stresemann government in Berlin, Hitler and elements of the Kampfbund made their move. Hitler realised that the survival of the movement now demanded action, and the decision was made to seize control of the government of Bavaria by force. It was 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. On that evening, heavily armed stormtroopers encircled the Bürgerbräukeller, a beer hall where Kahr and the other Bavarian leaders were attending a political meeting. Hitler announced his presence with a pistol shot through the ceiling, then jumped onto the stage to announce that the Bavarian and national governments were deposed and that a new national government had been set up, led by himself. Kahr, Lossow and Seisser yielded to pressure and threats and reluctantly agreed. General Ludendorff was hastily summoned from his home to attend the beer hall, and with his backing and prestige a show of unity was finally achieved.

However, by the next morning it was clear that the putsch had failed. Kahr, now confident of the support of the army, denounced the events of the night before, and declared both the Nazi Party and the Kampfbund dissolved. The Bavarian army under Lossow was not prepared to back the putsch as military reinforcements entered the city. Hitler and his followers realised that their attempt to seize power had failed. At Ludendorff's suggestion, the Kampfbund decided to stage a march into the centre of Munich, hoping that this act of defiance might still win support.

In light snow and freezing weather, the marchers made their way from the beer hall across the River Isar into the city. As they approached the Odeonsplatz, the police, drawn up across a narrow street, opened fire on the marchers. Within a minute, 16 Nazi stormtroopers and four police were dead. Hitler, marching with Ludendorff at the head of the procession, fell to the ground, dislocating his shoulder, before escaping in a waiting car. Ludendorff refused to seek cover and marched on to the square before he was detained.

THE MUNICH PUTSCH

SOURCE A: An eyewitness account of events in the beer hall by one of Hitler's supporters, Ernst 'Putzi' Hanfstaengl

I got there early, about seven o'clock, to find the area cordoned off by police ... so there we stood with me trying to bluff our way through and no sign whatsoever of Hitler. It must have been half an hour or more before the red Benz car he had recently acquired drew up and he climbed out with Amann, Rosenberg and Ulrich Graf. 'These gentlemen are coming with me,' he said to the police inspector on duty and forward we all trotted at his heel ...

The wait seemed interminable ... Kahr was sending us off to sleep when the door behind us which we had come through flew open and in burst Göring plus twenty-five brownshirts with pistols and machine guns ... Hitler began to plough his way towards the platform and the rest of us surged forward behind him. Tables were overturned with their jugs of beer. Hitler clambered on a chair and fired a round at the ceiling. 'The National revolution has broken out. The Reichswehr is with us. Our flag is flying on their barracks.'

Hitler invited Kahr and company to join him in one of the side rooms to discuss their plans. There they were joined by Ludendorff, tremendous in full regimentals with all his decorations ...

After nearly half an hour the chief conspirators returned to the hall. Hitler had taken off his trench coat and was revealed in his so-called good clothes—a black tailcoat and waistcoat ... They all lined up on the platform, Kahr, Lossow, Seisser, Ludendorff, all looking very grave and history conscious, and Hitler in that baggy flabby suit with a big swastika button in his lapel and the Iron Cross on his left breast. He made a short announcement that a National Government had been formed. A solemn oath was taken by all the partners followed by the most impressive singing of *Deutschland über alles* (the national anthem) I have ever heard.

Ernst Hanfstaengl, *Hitler: The Missing Years*, Eyre & Spottiswoode, London, 1957, p. 95.

SOURCE B: The German historian Joachim Fest

Dressed in a black suit and wearing his Iron Cross Hitler drove to the Bürger Bräu Keller. Next to him in the recently acquired red Mercedes sat Alfred Rosenberg and Ulrich Graf ... Kahr was well into his speech when Hitler appeared in the door of the beer hall ... In a moment some trucks full of SA men roared up and the troops swarmed out to cordon off the building. Hitler held up a beer stein and as a heavy machine gun made its appearance at his side he took a dramatic swallow then dashed the stein to the floor and with a pistol in his raised hand stormed into the middle of the hall at the head of an armed squad. Hitler leapt up on a table, fired his famous shot into the ceiling to catch the crowd's attention and forced his way through the dumbfounded throng to the podium. 'The National Revolution has begun,' he cried. 'The hall is surrounded by 600 heavily armed men. No one may leave the premises ... the Bavarian and the National Governments have been overthrown ... the Reichswehr and the state police are approaching under the swastika flag' ... He then told Kahr, Lossow and Seisser to follow him into the next room ...

Meanwhile, Scheubner-Richter had dashed off in the Mercedes to fetch Ludendorff who had not been let in on the secret ... Nervous and somewhat shaken by his failure to convince Kahr and the other two Hitler returned to the crowd where he felt surer of himself ...

In the meantime Ludendorff had arrived. Without preliminaries he launched into a speech urging the three men to shake hands on the coup, he himself had also been taken by surprise. Only now under the personal sway of the legendary national figure did the men begin to give way, one by one.



Lossow like a good soldier took Ludendorff's recommendation ... Seisser followed his lead, and only Kahr stubbornly refused ... But in the end Kahr yielded to pressure. The five returned to the hall to put on a show of brotherhood.

Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 182.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What position or rank did each of the following men hold?
 - i Ludendorff
 - ii Lossow
 - iii Kahr
 - iv Seisser
- 2 Identify the similarities and differences in these two accounts of the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch.
- 3 Source A is the recollection of an eyewitness to the event. Source B is the account of a respected historian. Which source do you believe is more reliable? Why?

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

Hitler's lenient treatment by the court reveals the true attitude of the judiciary to the Weimar Republic. As one of the conservative right-wing groups that made up German society, the judiciary had never supported the new republic. The judges at Hitler's trial basically agreed with Hitler, who was allowed to dominate the proceedings. Their view reflected the opinion of the German historian Friedrich Meinecke, who wrote that 'loyalty to the Fatherland required disloyalty to the Republic'. To those like Hitler, who displayed this disloyalty, justice gave a degree of tolerance and leniency.



General Ludendorff (centre), Adolf Hitler and Ernst Röhm (third from right) with others before their trial in 1924 after the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch

HITLER AT HIS TRIAL IN MUNICH, MARCH 1924



Hitler's trial speech

I do not enter this court to deny anything or to reject my responsibility. I bear the responsibility all alone but I declare one thing: I am no criminal because of that. There is no such thing as high treason against the traitors of 1918 ...

I accuse Ebert, Stresemann and their comrades of treason. I accuse them because they have destroyed a nation of 70 million ... I do not consider myself a man who committed high treason but as a German who wanted the best for his people ...

The Putsch of November 8 did not fail. Of the young men who fell may it be said, 'They too died for the Fatherland.' Therein lies the visible sign of the triumph of November 9 ... I believe that the hour will come when the masses who stand today in the streets under our swastika flag will unite with those who fired on us on November 8. When I heard that it was the police who did the shooting, I was happy that it was not the Reichswehr that had besmirched its honour, the honour of the Reichswehr remains untarnished. The day will come when the Reichswehr will stand on our side, officers and men ...

For it is not you gentlemen who pronounce judgment on us. Instead the judgment of the eternal court of history will pronounce against this prosecution which has been raised against us ... that court will judge us as Germans who wanted the good of their own people and Fatherland, who wanted to fight and die. You may judge us guilty a thousand times over but the Goddess of Eternal Justice will smile and tear to tatters the verdict of this court. For she acquits us.

Quoted in Ernst Forsthoff (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichte seit 1918 in Dokumenten*, Leipzig, 1935, p. 213.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who were 'the traitors of 1918'? Explain why, according to Hitler, there is 'no such thing as high treason' against them.
- 2 Explain why Hitler felt that it was important that the Reichswehr had not fired on the marchers on 9 November 1923.
- 3 What do you think Hitler sought to gain by this and similar speeches at his trial?

The importance of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch to the Nazi movement

Although the putsch failed and 16 Nazis were killed in the gunfire of 9 November, the Munich Beer Hall Putsch was in fact an important turning point for the Nazi movement.

- ◆ Hitler learnt one all-important lesson: 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 gave Hitler and his movement national publicity. After being a relatively unknown politician in Bavaria, he had become a national figure. After the putsch, all of Germany knew of Hitler and his movement. 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 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. Hitler knew that if he became leader of Germany the army would be vital for his future plans. After his dictatorship became a reality from 1934, the army remained the only organisation in Germany that had the capacity to remove him.

THE MUNICH BEER HALL PUTSCH, 1923

- ◆ In 1923, amid the chaos of that year, the Nazi Party was large enough to attempt to seize power in Bavaria.
- ◆ Hitler and his followers detained the leaders of Bavaria at a political rally in a Munich beer hall on 8 November 1923.
- ◆ The putsch failed when the army refused to back the attempt.
- ◆ On the following day (9 November) in a show of defiance the Nazis marched into the centre of Munich, where their demonstration was broken up by armed police.
- ◆ Hitler and some of his followers were arrested for treason.
- ◆ The lenient treatment Hitler received by the court reveals the attitude of the German judiciary.
- ◆ Hitler used his trial in 1924 to promote his party and his views. Although he was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, he had become a national figure.
- ◆ The putsch had important results for the Nazi Party, including Hitler's belief that the way to power was through 'legality'.

5.3 SUMMARY

- 1 What was the Kampfbund?
- 2 Why did Hitler attempt the Munich Putsch in November 1923?
- 3 Which other well-known Germans were involved in the putsch?
- 4 What can you infer from the lenient sentences given to those involved in the putsch?
- 5 Write the closing address that you would have given if you were the prosecutor in the case.
- 6 How did the failure of the Munich Putsch contribute to the Nazis' eventual success?

5.3 QUESTIONS

5.4

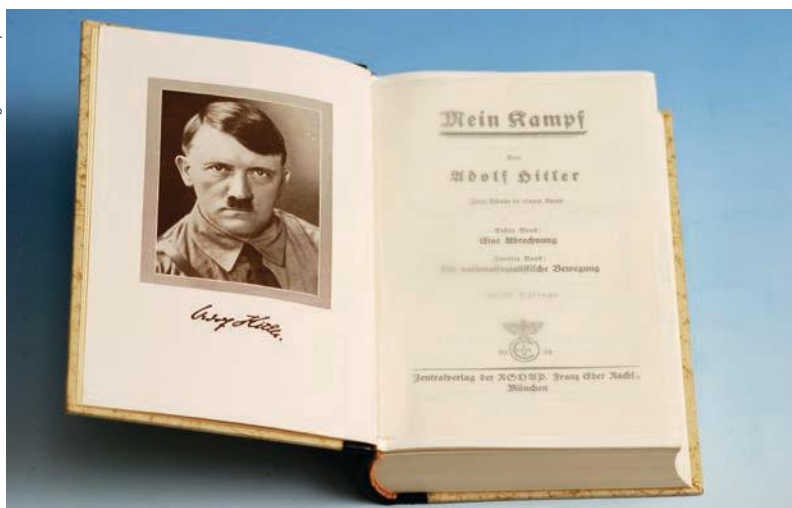
REBUILDING THE PARTY, 1923–1929

Adolf Hitler and *Mein Kampf*



In 1924 Hitler was sentenced to five years in prison for his part in the Munich Putsch, but as a political prisoner he was treated well. He was given his own room, allowed unlimited visitors and given special food, and he had the company of other Nazis who were also in prison. One of them, Rudolf Hess, had fled to Austria after the putsch but he returned voluntarily to join Hitler in prison as his secretary.

During this time in prison Hitler began work on his book. Originally entitled *A Four and a Half Year Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice: A Reckoning with the Destroyers of the Nazi Party Movement*, it was later renamed *Mein Kampf* (*My Struggle*). Part of the book is about Hitler's early life, although historical research shows that much of this material is inaccurate. The bulk of the book outlines Hitler's political ideas and his views on race and Germany's future role in world affairs. The book was poorly written and was not popular when it appeared in 1925, but after Hitler came to power in 1933 it became a bestseller. Since Hitler took no salary when he was leader of Germany, most of his income came from sales of the book.



Mein Kampf, written while Hitler was in prison in 1924. The book outlined Hitler's world view, or *Weltanschauung*.

Hitler's world view (*Weltanschauung*)

The British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper said 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'.¹² But it is also an important book, because it reveals a great deal about Hitler's mind and outlook, and the ideas that became the basis of National Socialism – for Hitler's ideas did not change.

According to Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw, many made the mistake of treating *Mein Kampf* with ridicule and not taking the ideas Hitler expressed seriously. 'However base and repellent (his ideas) were,' writes Kershaw, 'Hitler never saw any reason to alter the content of what he had written'.¹³ What he wrote as his philosophy in 1924 he began to implement as policy as soon as he became supreme ruler of Germany after 1934.

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 – most of his ideas were taken from a number of nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century writers such as Hegel, Nietzsche, Treitschke, the racial theorist Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and others. Nor was National Socialism ever a systematic or developed ideology like Marxism.

Hitler may not have been an original thinker, 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'.

At the core of Nazi beliefs were four fundamentals that did not change:

- ◆ extreme nationalism
- ◆ racism
- ◆ anti-communism
- ◆ a contempt for liberal democracy and the parliamentary system.

Nationalism

At the heart of Hitler's *Weltanschauung*, or world view, was a deeply felt sense of nationalism. 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, claiming that to achieve this, a revival of the national will was needed. Once the national will had been revitalised, Hitler believed that all the Germanic-speaking peoples of Europe were destined to unite to create a greater Reich, populated by racially pure Germanic peoples. In this sense the Nazi movement was ultra-nationalist and racist.

As part of this intense nationalism, the Nazis defined the targets on which the German people should concentrate their hatred and fear. Germany had been betrayed by the democracy imposed on them in 1918; there were also the Jews who threatened the racial purity of the German state and the communists who sought to destroy it. Hitler and the Nazis gave many Germans exactly what they wanted – someone to blame and someone to look to for salvation.

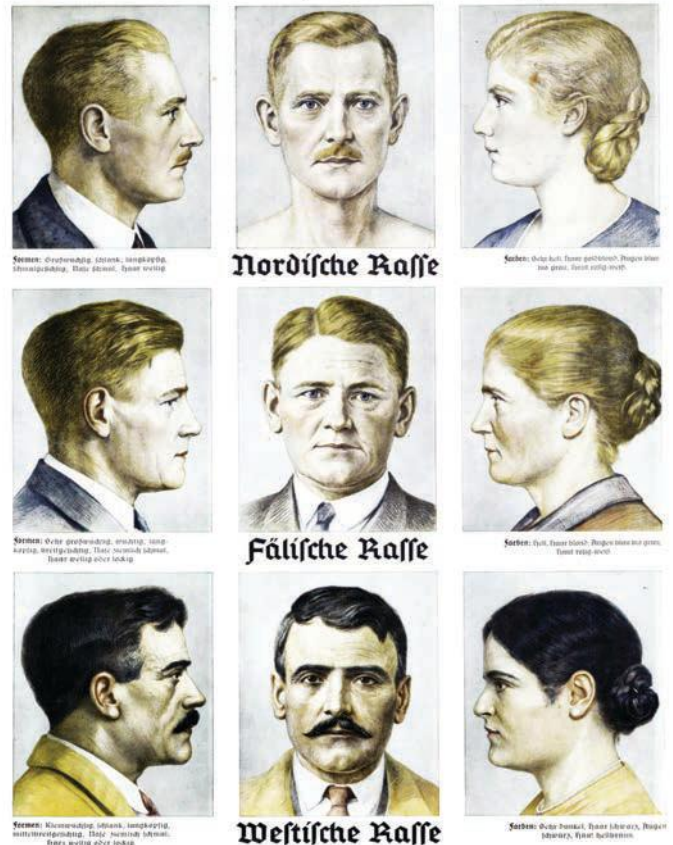
Racism

Hitler had a racist view of world history, and his concept of race is the dominant theme running through *Mein Kampf*. The protection and expansion of the German race was Hitler's highest priority.

To Hitler, the **Aryan** race (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 lowest level of race was the *Untermenschen* (a term used in Nazi Germany that can translate as 'subhuman'). In Hitler's racial world these were the Jews, the Slavonic races of eastern Europe, and black people. The Aryan race was the creative force in human history. 'Civilisation,' wrote Hitler, 'was almost exclusively the product of the Aryan creative power ... it was the Aryan alone who founded a superior type of humanity.'¹⁴

To Hitler, the Jew represented the absolute contrast to the Aryan, a threat to the purity of the Aryan race. He also believed that civilisations decline and fall only when they fail to maintain the purity of their race. Historians have long debated how and when Hitler embraced his violent anti-Semitism. He would have come across such ideas in his years of struggle on the streets of pre-war Vienna, where anti-Semitism was widespread, but it is probable that his racist anti-Semitism took its final embedded form in the 1920s. Whatever its origins, it was a belief he never lost, from the days of his youth to his last days in the bunker.

Bilder deutscher Rassen 1



A Nazi Party 'German Race' wall chart. After the Nazis came to power, charts of this type, which classified racial groupings, were not uncommon in German schools.

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 were allowed to do. There was no freedom in Hitler's world. Marriage, for example, should be allowed only between pure, healthy Germans. In Hitler's savage vision, the sick, the unhealthy and the weak would be banned from having children, to keep from infecting the race.

Anti-communism

One of the consistent themes of the Nazi movement was its opposition to communism. As a movement of the extreme right, the Nazis were the natural opponents of the left, but Hitler also saw in communism an international movement seeking to spread its influence throughout the world. Hitler linked his hatred of communism with his hatred of the Jews, seeing the Jews as part of this international threat. Many of the leaders of the Russian Revolution had been Jewish, and within Germany Jews like Kurt Eisner and Rosa Luxemburg had led the communist uprisings in 1918–1919. Hitler saw communism as part of a Jewish world conspiracy.

Democracy and the state

Hitler expressed his contempt for the idea of parliamentary democracy and the Weimar Republic in *Mein Kampf*. Democracy was weak and ineffective and democratic ideas, personal freedom, the concept of equality and the rights of the individual played no part in Hitler's world view. The emphasis was on the nation, with the individual finding true fulfilment only by submitting to the will of the nation. In Hitler's mind, the German democracy and the Weimar Republic were 'the greatest miscarriage of the twentieth century', because the system and its leaders had betrayed Germany.¹⁵

The leadership principle (*Führerprinzip*)

In place of democracy – the will of the people – Hitler believed in the will of the leader, who would interpret the needs of the people and lead the nation forward. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler wrote of the need for a national revival. Germany's problems had not been caused by military defeat; rather, Germany had lost the war because of 'inner rottenness, cowardice, lack of character – in short unworthiness'. Germany had to rediscover the will to revive itself. This required, in Hitler's thinking, a strong leader who would emerge unchallenged by the restraints of democracy and parliament and who would lead the nation to its historic destiny. The concept of such a leader, who ruled absolutely and without restraint and who would be the total focus of the loyalty of the nation, became the idea of the *Führerprinzip* (the leadership principle).

Other elements of Nazi thought that were propounded by Hitler included the following.

The 'socialism' of National Socialism

Nazism was usually called National Socialism, and in the party's 25 Point Program there were a number of beliefs that had a socialist theme. These include the nationalisation of business, profit sharing and increased protection for the needy. Some National Socialists took these socialist goals very seriously, and they formed what is sometimes called the left wing of the Nazi movement. It soon became obvious that German industrialists, capitalists and big business, who were inclined to support parties of the right, found this socialist part of the Nazi program very difficult to accept.

Hitler, focused on the quest for power, put less and less emphasis on any aspect of Nazism that challenged capitalism. He needed the support of big business, and in the end he achieved this support. In Nazi Germany capitalism did very well. From the time the Nazis came to power in 1933 until the outbreak of war in 1939, the profits of German industry rose by more than 36 per cent.¹⁶ Hitler's idea of socialism involved all Germans, regardless of class or income, working together for the national good. All racially pure Germans (the Jews were excluded) belonged to the German *Volk* or people. What the Nazis came to preach was the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the People's Community, to which all true Germans belonged.

Social Darwinism

A central theme of Hitler's thinking was the idea of struggle. In the nineteenth century the naturalist Charles Darwin (1809–1882) 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 nineteenth 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 ... It is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle ... 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.'¹⁷

Propaganda and control

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler offered some insights into his thinking on the exercise of power, and in particular the important role of propaganda. Hitler had no faith in the intelligence of the masses. 'Their understanding is feeble,' he wrote. '... they quickly forget.' Effective propaganda required simple concepts that were constantly repeated. Persistence was the most important condition of success. The message must be delivered with conviction and vehemence, and the spoken word was always more effective than the written word.

Key terms associated with National Socialism

- ◆ Nationalism
- ◆ anti-Semitism
- ◆ anti-Communism
- ◆ anti-Democratic
- ◆ *Volksgemeinschaft*
- ◆ *Volk*
- ◆ Social Darwinism
- ◆ Aryan
- ◆ *Führerprinzip*
- ◆ *Lebensraum*

The quest for living space (*Lebensraum*)

Hitler's nationalism, his obsession with race and the creation of a pure racial state, and his concept of struggle in human society directly shaped his view of Germany's future role in the world. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler outlined a bold vision of Germany's future. It was the destiny of the German people (the *Volk*) to create a great German Reich that would dominate Europe. The German people had to acquire territory, and this meant a deliberate policy of eastern European expansion, 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 German slaves, and this vast Reich would last for a thousand years.

FROM THE HISTORIAN VOLKER ULLRICH

He [Hitler] envisaged a war for living space as a relatively risk-free endeavour. He saw the Soviet Union as being in the hands of 'Jewish Bolsheviks', which in his logic meant that Russia racial foundation had been decisively weakened. The 'gigantic empire in the east is ripe for collapse', Hitler wrote ... [His] two most important goals [were] the destruction of 'Jewish Bolshevism' and the conquest of 'living space in the east.' Despite all the tactical flexibility and political manoeuvrability he was to show later in his career, Hitler always insisted on these two goals with dogmatic rigidity.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent, 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, pp. 179, 180.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Which elements of Nazi 'ideology' can be identified in the source?
- 2 Why did Hitler want to expand into the Soviet Union?

EXTRACTS FROM THE SPEECHES AND WRITINGS OF ADOLF HITLER

SOURCE A: Hitler's speech in Munich, 12 April 1922

There are only two possibilities in Germany: do not imagine that the people will for ever go with the middle party, the party of compromises: one day it will turn to those who have most consistently foretold the coming ruin and have sought to dissociate themselves from it. And that party is either the Left – and then God help us for it will lead us to complete destruction – to Bolshevism, or else it is a party of the Right which at the last, when the people are in utter despair, when it has lost all its spirit and has no longer any faith in anything, is determined for its part ruthlessly to seize the reins of power.

Hitler's speech in Munich, 12 April 1922

SOURCE B: Hitler on democracy and the state

The best State constitution and State form is that which, with the most natural certainty, brings the best heads of the national community to leading importance and to leading influence ...

The State in its organisation, beginning with the smallest cell of the community up to the highest leadership of the entire Reich, must be built upon the principle of personality. There must be no decisions by majority.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, Hurst & Blackett, London, 1939, p. 588.

SOURCE C: Hitler on race

All the human culture, all the results of art, science, and technology that we see before us today, are almost exclusively the creative product of the Aryan ... he alone was the founder of all higher humanity, therefore representing the prototype of all that we understand by the word man.





If we were to divide mankind into three groups, the founders of culture, the bearers of culture, the destroyers of culture, only the Aryan could be considered as the representative of the first group. From him originates the foundation walls of all human creation ... Hence it is no accident that the first cultures arose in places where the Aryan, in his encounters with lower peoples, subjugated them to his will. Thus the road the Aryan had to take was clearly marked out. As a conqueror he subjected the lower beings and regulated their practical activity under his command, according to his will and for his purpose ... As long as he ruthlessly upheld the master attitude, not only did he really remain master, but also the preserver and increaser of culture ... As soon as the subjected people began to raise themselves up the sharp dividing line between master and servant fell. The Aryan failed to maintain the purity of his blood and therefore lost his place in the paradise which he had made for himself. He became submerged in the racial mixture ... Blood mixture and the resultant drop in the racial level is the sole cause of the dying out of old cultures, for men do not perish as a result of lost wars, but by the loss of that force of resistance which is contained only in pure blood.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, Hutchinson, London, 1969, pp. 263, 268, 269.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are some of the key beliefs of the Nazi movement mentioned in these extracts?
- 2 Why would these beliefs have had a measure of popular appeal in postwar Germany?
- 3 How would these sources be useful to a historian studying Hitler's beliefs? In your answer consider the type of source, the information they contain and what you can infer from them.

Summary: Hitler's world view

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

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

Divisions within the Nazi Party

Hitler left prison in December 1924 having served just eight months of his five-year sentence. The judicial system had never supported the republic, and right-wing opponents of the republic were usually treated leniently.

By 1924 Germany had begun to enjoy a measure of stability after the challenges of 1923. The German economy had begun to recover, with falling unemployment, real wages and industrial production increasing, and money being spent on social welfare and housing. As the good times returned, the extremist views of the Nazis were less attractive. Nazism was a movement that thrived in conditions of disorder and hardship; now the Nazi movement seemed to be on the wane, and Hitler was dismissed by many as an almost comical figure.

Hitler emerged from prison determined to rebuild the Nazi Party. The party had lost support after the failure of 1923, membership had fallen, the party newspaper had closed, and Hitler himself was banned from public speaking in a number of German states, including Bavaria and Prussia. There was also division within the party about its future direction.

While Hitler was in prison, a possible rival had emerged in Gregor Strasser, who had increased the party's influence in the industrial regions of northern Germany. Strasser and his followers represented the left wing of the Nazi movement and sought to emphasise the socialist part of the Nazi program. They hoped to make the movement more anti-capitalist, and set out to win the loyalty of the working class away from the SPD (Social Democrats) and the KPD (Communist Party), who they traditionally supported. Hitler rejected this trend. The failure of the 1923 putsch had convinced him that power could be achieved only by legal means within the existing system. The party needed to achieve victory in the polls, and this required it to have a broader appeal. In particular, it needed to appeal to middle-class Germans.

HITLER ON THE DIRECTION OF THE NAZI MOVEMENT

SOURCE STUDY

Instead of working to achieve power by an armed coup we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the Catholic and Marxist deputies. If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own Constitution! Any lawful process is slow. But sooner or later we shall have a majority — and after that Germany.

Quoted in Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich*, Penguin Books, 1972, p. 60.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point Hitler is making in this extract.
- 2 Explain the reference to 'Catholic and Marxist deputies'.
- 3 How and why has Hitler changed the direction of the Nazi movement?

Reorganising the party

Banned from public speaking for two years, Hitler adopted an easier lifestyle. He took a house on the Obersalzberg, a scenic area above the town of Berchtesgaden in southern Germany. This would later become Hitler's home, and an area he returned to frequently for the rest of his life. Hitler slowly rebuilt the party, believing that the good times Germany was enjoying would not last. Internal divisions were settled as Hitler reasserted his authority and leadership.

To achieve power, the party had to be reorganised.

- ◆ 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. In 1926 the Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*) was set up for boys aged 15 to 18, and for girls there was the League of German Maidens (*Bund Deutscher Mädel*).
- ◆ There were party groups for students, and for specialist groups such as doctors, teachers and lawyers.
- ◆ In 1926 the Schutzstaffel, or SS, was set up. Unlike the often-unruly stormtroopers, or SA, this was to be a highly disciplined elite group. Their initial role was to be Hitler's personal bodyguards, and they wore a distinctive black uniform to set them apart.
- ◆ It was necessary to promote the party. As Hitler revealed in *Mein Kampf*, he understood the vital importance of propaganda. Rallies, parades and political meetings promoted the party and its message.
- ◆ Party membership grew from 27 000 members in 1925 to 130 000 members by 1929. In 1927 the Nazis held their first party rally in the town of Nuremberg. It became an annual event until the outbreak of war. At the party rally at Nuremberg in 1929, more than 40 000 people attended and 25 000 stormtroopers (SA) and SS men marched on parade.

SOURCE A



ima geto/Mary Evans Picture Library

Horst Wessel leads his SA formation through the streets of Nuremberg during the fourth Nazi Party Rally in August 1929.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Investigate who Horst Wessel (pictured above) was and what happened to him.
- 2 Explain how and why he became an important figure in the Nazi movement.
- 3 Explain why rallies and public displays were important for the Nazi movement.

SOURCE B: The Nazi Party in 1929

Hitler had reason to feel satisfied with the way his movement had developed over the four years since its refoundation. The party was now almost three times as large as it had been at the time of the putsch, and growing fast ... Hitler's own mastery was complete. His own recipe for success was unchanged: hammer home the same message, exploit any opportunity for agitation, and hope for external forces to favour the party. But although great strides forward had been made ... no realist could have reckoned much to its chances of winning power. For that Hitler's only hope was a massive and comprehensive crisis of the state.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 311.

QUESTIONS

- 1 In your own words explain what Hitler's 'recipe for success' was.
- 2 What evidence is there in this extract that Hitler
 - i was an opportunist
 - ii believed in the importance of propaganda
 - iii believed in the power of the will?
- 3 At this stage, why did Hitler hold little chance of winning power?

BIOGRAPHY

IMPORTANT FIGURES OF THE NAZI MOVEMENT



Alamy Stock Photo/Pictorial Press Ltd

Hermann Göring

There were some men who had been part of the Nazi movement from the earliest days. They were called the *Alte Kämpfer* (the old fighters). When the party came to power Hitler rewarded many of these men with positions in the government departments, and with disability pensions for those who had been injured in the street fighting that had helped bring the Nazis to power. Above the ranks of the party members, the leading figures of the Nazi movement were also emerging. By the late 1920s, these included:

Hermann Göring (1893–1946)

Göring had been a decorated flyer in World War I and was the last commander of the Richthoffen Flying Squadron. He joined the Nazi Party in 1922 and was wounded in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch the following year. When the Nazis came to power, Göring held a number of key positions, including Commander in Chief of the

German Air Force. He was second only to Hitler in importance in Nazi Germany. He was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trial, but committed suicide a few hours before he was due to hang.

Rudolf Hess (1894–1987)

An early member of the Nazi Party, Hess took part in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch and later joined Hitler in prison, assisting him as he worked on *Mein Kampf*. In 1933 Hess was appointed Deputy Führer. In 1941 he flew to Britain claiming that he was on a peace mission. He was immediately arrested, and spent the rest of the war in prison. In 1946 he was sentenced to life imprisonment, and committed suicide in Spandau Prison, Berlin, in 1987, aged 93 years.



Getty Images/Corbis Historical

Rudolf Hess

Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945)

Himmler joined the Nazi Party in August 1923 and took part in the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. In 1929 he was appointed leader of the small SS, Hitler's personal bodyguard. Himmler became one of the most powerful and feared figures in Nazi Germany when he took control of both the SS and the Gestapo, the instruments of the Nazi police state. During the war Himmler's SS was responsible for the systematic extermination of the Jews. At the end of the war Himmler was captured by the British, and committed suicide.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Heinrich Himmler

Ernst Röhm (1887–1934)

A former captain in the German army, Röhm joined the Nazi Party and was a major influence in bringing ex-Freikorps men into the SA. In January 1931 Röhm became Chief of Staff of the SA. After the Nazis came to power, Röhm and the SA became a potential threat to Hitler. He was killed on Hitler's orders when Hitler eliminated the leadership of the SA in the so-called 'Night of the Long Knives' on 30 June 1934.



imagefolk/dpa

Ernst Röhm

Martin Bormann (1900–1945)

Martin Bormann was born in 1900 and joined the Nazi Party in 1924. Although unpopular with many other top Nazis, Bormann's abilities as an efficient administrator saw him rise in the party structure. When Hess flew to England in 1941 on his 'peace' mission, Bormann became head of the Party Chancellery and Hitler's principal secretary. He came to control the various Gauleiters and party appointments. Constantly with Hitler, he controlled access to the German leader and influenced the direction of Nazi policy on many issues, including the treatment of the Jews. He stayed with his Führer until Hitler committed suicide in April 1945, and was himself killed a few days later while attempting to break out of Berlin in the last days of the war.



Getty Images/Corbis Historical

Martin Bormann

Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945)

Dr Joseph Goebbels joined the Nazi Party after an unsuccessful start in journalism. Intelligent, ruthless and with great oratory and organisational skills, Goebbels fell under Hitler's influence and became one of his most devoted followers. In 1926 Hitler appointed him *Gauleiter* for Berlin, and a short time later he was put in charge of the party's propaganda section. When the Nazis came to power, Goebbels became one of the most important and influential figures of the regime as Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment. Goebbels was one of the few Nazi leaders of genuine intellectual ability, and he also proved to be one of the most fanatical. At the end of the war in 1945 he and his wife committed suicide after arranging for their five children to be killed.



imagefolk/Image Asset Management

Joseph Goebbels

FROM THE DIARY OF JOSEPH GOEBBELS, 1925–1926

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.

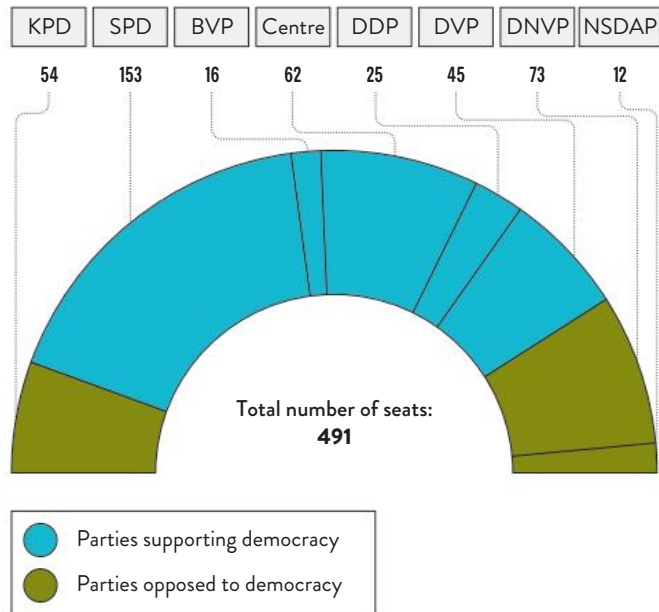
19 April 1926

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.

Louis Lochner (trans.), *The Goebbels Diaries*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1948.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What evidence is there in these diary entries to explain Goebbels' fanatical loyalty to Hitler?
- 2 What do you think Goebbels meant by his observation that Hitler was 'both great and simple'?
- 3 How can diary entries be useful to historians? What are some of their limitations?

May 1928

The Reichstag elections, 1928

The 1928 election

In the general elections of May 1928 more than two-thirds of the voters backed the moderate democratic parties. The SPD 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 just 12 seats and the German National People's Party (DNVP) dropping to 73 seats, from 103 seats in 1924.

The elections of 1928 appeared to be a victory for the parties that supported the German democracy. The SPD returned to government for the first time since 1920, and the SPD leader, Hermann Müller, formed a coalition government of the SPD, the German Democratic Party (DDP), the Centre Party and the German People's Party (DVP).

Hitler and Hugenberg

Despite all their efforts, the Nazi Party in 1928 still operated on the fringe of German politics. However, in 1929, just before the onset of the Great Depression, Hitler took the opportunity to move the Nazis to the centre stage.

In July 1929 the leader of the German National People's Party (DNVP), Alfred Hugenberg, organised a committee of right-wing groups to oppose the Young Plan. Hugenberg was a ruthless and ambitious industrialist who had made his fortune in the days of the hyperinflation. In 1929 he controlled a number of major newspapers and film outlets in the country.

Hugenberg's alliance included his own German National People's Party (DNVP), which had now moved further to the right of German politics, the Stahlhelm (a nationalist ex-servicemen's organisation), the Pan-German League, a number of powerful and influential industrialists and, finally, the Nazi Party.

This brief alliance with the other right-wing groups was a success for the Nazi Party. The party had made its most direct contact so far with the powerful German industrialists who shared the party's dislike of the republic. The party had been able to use other people's money to promote the Nazi movement, and the members also had the opportunity to refine their growing skills at propaganda and persuasion. Hugenberg's 700 newspapers across the country were used to full effect. The alliance also displayed Hitler's cunning and political skill in exploiting an opportunity. But above all, the alliance projected Hitler into the national political arena. At a time when Germany began to slide into the despair of the Great Depression, Hitler had arrived at the centre of German politics.



Nazi propaganda to 1933

THE NAZI PARTY 1924–1928

- ◆ During his time in prison Hitler wrote his book, *Mein Kampf*, which outlines some of the key beliefs of the Nazi movement.
- ◆ After his release from prison in 1924 Hitler focused his attention on rebuilding the Nazi Party.
- ◆ A number of the key figures who would gain prominence in the Nazi Party, such as Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler and Rudolf Hess, joined the party in the early 1920s.
- ◆ Despite the increasing profile of the party in Germany, the Nazi Party failed to gain any political success in the Reichstag elections of 1924 and 1928.

5.4 SUMMARY

1 Explain the meaning of the following terms:

- i Volk
- ii Social Darwinism
- iii Aryan
- iv Führerprinzip
- v Gaue

2 Research one of the following Nazis. Prepare a short speech for the class that assesses their importance to the Nazi Party, including their roles and responsibilities. Support your speech with a range of images of your chosen individual.

- Joseph Goebbels
- Ernst Röhm
- Martin Bormann
- Heinrich Himmler
- Rudolf Hess
- Hermann Göring

3 Prepare a mind map of the main elements of Nazi 'ideology'.

4 Explain why the Munich Putsch of 1923 was an important event in the history of the Nazi movement.

5 How and why was Hitler important to the growth of the Nazi movement from 1923 to the start of the Great Depression in 1929?

5.4 QUESTIONS

- 6 Using at least one source to support your answer, account for the limited success of the Nazi Party by 1929.
- 7 Have each person in the class adopt a different persona, e.g. World War I veteran, middle-class woman, working-class man, farmer, industrialist, teacher, Junker, clergyman. How is your individual likely to be faring in the mid-1920s? Which elements of Nazi ideology are likely to resonate with your individual? Which elements is your individual likely to reject? Is your individual likely to support the Nazis at this stage? Report your findings back to the class.

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTION

- 1 Evaluate the role of the Nazis in Germany to 1929.

Endnotes

- 1 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, Hutchinson, London, 1969, pp. 9–10.
- 2 Quoted in Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Penguin Books, London, 1963, p. 27.
- 3 August Kubizek, *The Young Hitler I Knew*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1955, p. 153.
- 4 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Murphy translation, Hurst & Blackett, London, 1939, p. 145.
- 5 Hitler to Joseph Popp, 26 January 1915, quoted in Eberhard Jäckel (ed.), *Hitler: Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen: 1905–1924*, Deutsche Verlags, Stuttgart, 1980, no. 26, p. 60.
- 6 *Mein Kampf*, p. 46.
- 7 *Mein Kampf*, p. 176.
- 8 David Lewis, *The Man Who Invented Hitler*, Headline Publishing, London, 2003, p. 185.
- 9 Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, p. 58.
- 10 Hitler address entitled *The Bankruptcy of the State and its Salvation* at the Zum Deutschen Reich Inn, 16 January 1920, quoted in Volker Ullrich, *Hitler, Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, p. 89.
- 11 Hitler, quoted in Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 143.
- 12 Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Listener*, January 1973.
- 13 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 244.
- 14 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, p. 263.
- 15 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 277.
- 16 Dick Geary, 'The Nazi New Society' in Gordon Martel (ed.), *A Companion to Europe 1900–1945*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2006, p. 362.
- 17 Hitler, speech at Kulmbach, 5 February 1928.

The failure of democracy: The Nazis come to power

6.1

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND
THE GREAT DEPRESSION

6.2

HITLER'S PATH TO POWER,
1929–1933

6.3

THE FAILURE OF THE
DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

6.4

WHY DID THE NAZIS
COME TO POWER?



Hitler (left) with Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen (far right) in March 1933 shortly after Hitler became Chancellor

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

deflationary policy

A deflationary policy involved cutting government spending, increasing taxes, and attempting to balance the budget. It was one way governments could deal with the impact of the Great Depression, and it was the policy followed by the German government from 1930.

genocide

The murder of a race. The Nazis committed genocide when they set out to destroy the Jewish people.

moratorium

A temporary delay in the payment of money. In June 1931 President Hoover of the United States proposed a one-year moratorium on reparation payments in an attempt to help Germany recover from its economic difficulties.

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

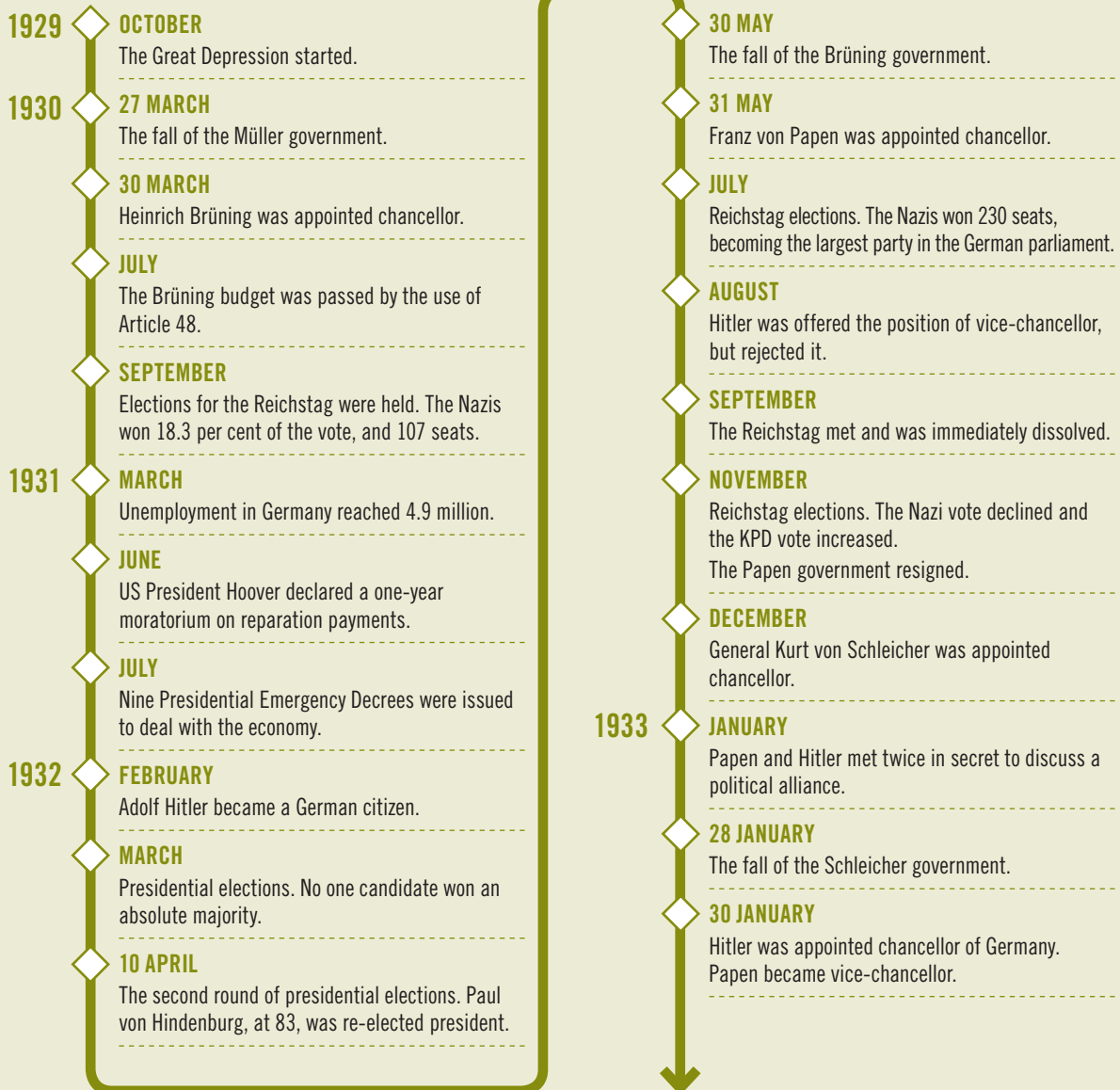
from 1930, chancellors Brüning and Papen relied on the president to enact their legislation through presidential decree. This process ignored the will of the elected parliament, and was a step towards the failure of parliamentary democracy in Germany.

totalitarian (totalitarianism)

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

TIMELINE

The failure of democracy



6.1

THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Causes of the Great Depression in Germany

Germany's prosperity after 1924 was financed for the most part by borrowed money. Throughout the 1920s, the German Reichsbank deliberately kept interest rates high in order to attract foreign investment. Between 1924 and 1929 this investment money was substantial, with 23 billion marks coming into Germany from the United States alone. This 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 8 billion marks, which came directly from foreign loans, were used to pay reparations. The basic weakness of the German economy was that the country was using short-term loans to fund long-term projects. In addition, Germany never had a favourable balance of trade – the cost of the country's imports was greater than the value of its exports.

In 1928, before the onset of the Great 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 onto the booming New York stock market. Interest rates in Germany were raised in the hope of attracting investment, and this contributed to a drop-off in economic activity at home. Production slowed and unemployment began to rise. At the start of 1929 there were 1.5 million people unemployed. By the end of the year that figure had climbed to 3 million.

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 German economy began to experience the full impact of economic collapse. Industrial production began to fall, to the point that by late 1932 German production was down to 40 per cent of the 1928 level. The economic collapse after 1929 triggered unemployment, severe social hardship and political instability. Suddenly, the hard-won prosperity of the mid-1920s was gone.

What impact did the Great Depression have on Germany?

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. At last the difficult years seemed to have passed. The standard of living in Germany was higher than in any other European nation, and Germany was once again the greatest industrial power on the continent. Suddenly it all came to an end. By early 1933 unemployment had soared to more than 6 million people, living standards had collapsed, and business and industry were at a standstill.

The social impact of the Depression was also severe, and touched most classes in German society. 'The unemployed,' writes the British historian Michael Burleigh, 'spent their days reading newspapers, smoking, standing in meal queues, squabbling at benefit offices or loitering aimlessly in parks or on street corners. Men tried to keep warm in waiting rooms and fed themselves by scavenging in dustbins ... others held signs or carried placards advertising their desire for work. Many became apathetic and resigned to being unemployed.'¹

In the German countryside conditions for farmers were also hard as prices for agricultural products began to fall. German historian Volker Ullrich believes that this had overwhelming psychological consequences. 'The trying experiences of the post-war period of turmoil and

hyperinflation had left many Germans without the emotional strength to deal with an economic crisis that exceeded everything that had come before,' he writes. 'An apocalyptic mood of hopelessness began to take hold, even among those of the populace not primarily affected by the Depression'.² The generation that had been forced to endure war followed by defeat and humiliation in 1919 was now, just a decade later, forced to bear new burdens. Had the Depression not been so severe or so prolonged, it is possible that the republic might have survived, but as the hardship deepened the failure of the system was almost assured.

Economic and social hardship of this scale generates political instability, and in these conditions the extremist parties like the Nazis and the Communists thrived. For the Nazi Party in

particular, the coming of the Great Depression marked the point at which it moved from being a small fringe group to a mass party. Canadian historian Margaret MacMillan has taken the view that 'if it had not been for the Great Depression which hit Germany particularly hard and persuaded many Germans that radical new measures and a strong decisive leader were what they needed, Hitler would never have achieved power'.³

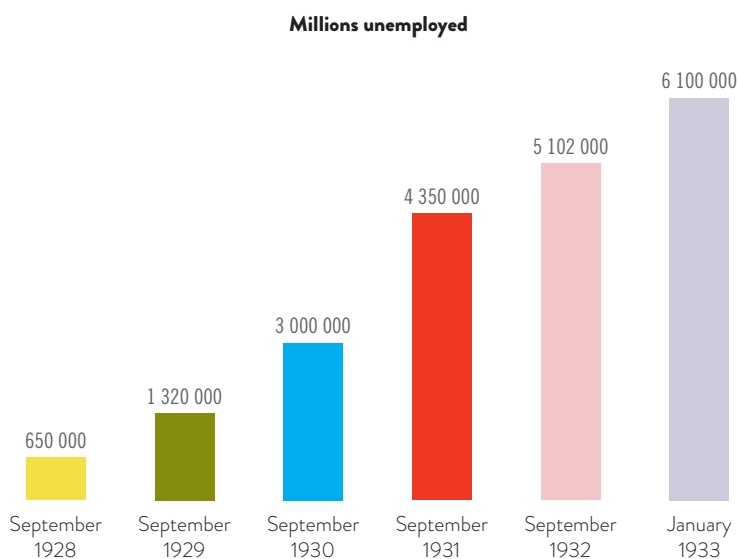
At the same time, the Social Democratic Party – the moderate party of the left, which had always been reformist and supportive of German democracy – was weakened by the onset of the Depression. In increasing numbers, workers, either unemployed or suffering as the economy failed, began to support the German Communist Party, the more extreme party of the left. These two extremist political groups, both enemies of German democracy, began to increase their following as the onset of the Depression undermined and hastened the loss of confidence in the parliamentary system.

The Great Depression, more than any other event, tipped the scales against the survival of the Weimar Republic and German democracy. The Weimar Republic, flawed and weak, had survived since 1919 but the impact of the Great Depression after 1929 was the final blow. The government had very few available options 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 to welfare spending and increases in taxation. The deflationary policy made the impact of the Depression even greater.

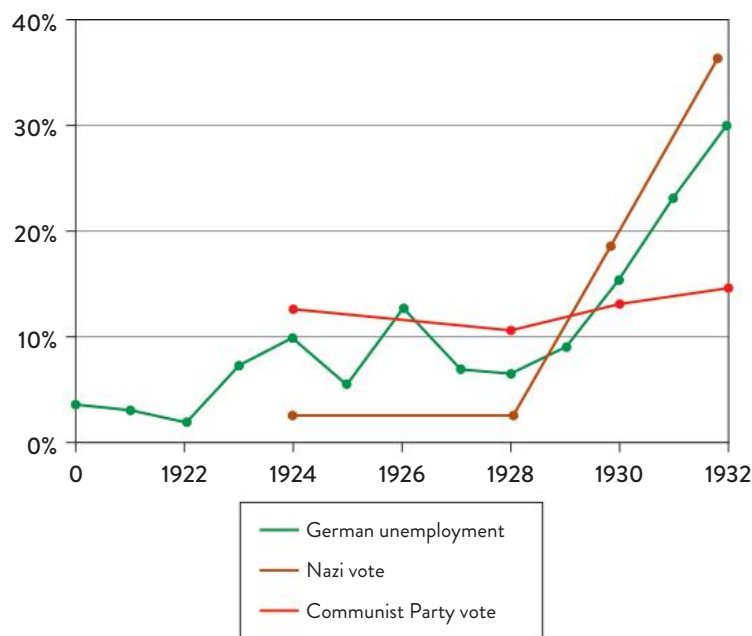
ullstein bild - Felix H. Man



The face of the Great Depression: unemployed young men playing cards in a hostel for homeless men in Charlottenburg, Berlin, in 1932



Registered unemployed in Germany, 1928–1933



German unemployment and support for the Nazi Party and German Communist Party (KPD), 1922–1932



THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION

- ◆ Germany enjoyed a period of relative economic stability and growth from 1924 to 1929, but this economic recovery was based very heavily on borrowed money.
- ◆ The onset of the Great Depression from late 1929 ended the flow of foreign capital into Germany, and many of these loans were recalled.
- ◆ German industry began to slow, production fell and unemployment started to increase. The German banking system became unstable.
- ◆ In times of social and economic hardship, extreme political parties of the left and right began to attract wider levels of support.
- ◆ In particular, the support for the Nazi movement grew, and as social and economic hardships increased, the Nazi Party began to emerge as a major political party in Germany.

6.1 SUMMARY

1 Place these events in the correct order

- A The panic selling of shares on the New York Stock Market causes further falls and the collapse of business confidence
- B Germans banks suffered a loss of income and earnings
- C Germans and American banks began to recall their loans they had made to Germans businesses
- D The Wall Street Stock Market collapse in New York.
- E Unemployment in Germany begins to climb dramatically
- F The inability of many Germans to buy products caused a fall in demand and the closure of many businesses

2 Provide evidence that the German economy was already faltering at the beginning of 1929.

3 Why did Germany's reliance on short-term loans make it more susceptible to the Great Depression?

6.1 QUESTIONS

6.2

HITLER'S PATH TO POWER, 1929–1933

The fall of the Müller government, March 1930

When the Depression began in Germany, the government was a coalition of Socialists (SPD), the German Democratic Party (DDP), the Centre Party and the German People's Party (DVP) under Chancellor Hermann Müller. Almost at once, the worsening economic problems strained the coalition and it became divided over the issue of relief payments for the unemployed. One of the great achievements of the Weimar Republic had been the development of the welfare state, which included health services, welfare payments and public housing. It was an achievement the SPD was rightly proud of, and it had been achieved despite the opposition of many middle-class Germans and the traditional orders, who objected to the taxes that were imposed to finance it.

As the economy collapsed from 1929 the SPD was determined to maintain these relief payments, not only to lessen the hardship but also to keep the working class from being driven to support the German Communist Party. The SPD wanted to increase taxes to fund additional unemployment relief, but the other parties of the coalition opposed the proposal, and on 27 March 1930 the divided government fell.

The position of President von Hindenburg

Germany's economic and political problems placed great demands on President von Hindenburg, who was now forced to play a more active role in the decision-making. It was a role Hindenburg had neither sought nor was prepared for. Increasingly, he turned to a small circle of men, particularly

conservative military figures, who influenced the elderly president. Chief among these was General Kurt von Schleicher, Chief of the Army Department, a man who enjoyed political intrigue and the exercise of power. Others, such as the president's son, Oskar von Hindenburg, and the president's state secretary, Otto Meißner, believed that Germany needed a strong government that would be above the party divisions and self-interest.

Presidential government

On Schleicher's advice Hindenburg appointed Heinrich Brüning, the leader of the Centre Party, as the new chancellor. Brüning had a good military record, which appealed to the president, and he was supportive of the interests of the German army, which appealed to Schleicher. As historian Michael Burleigh wrote, 'Brüning was a profoundly austere individual whose entrance into a room was said to spread an inhibiting chill. He was demanding of himself ... [and] he expected the whole nation to practise Prussian virtues of diligence and self sacrifice.'⁴

But Brüning's government did not have a majority in the Reichstag. The president was prepared to support Brüning by using Article 48 of the constitution, which gave the president



Heinrich Brüning



Heinrich Brüning (1885–1970), Chancellor of Germany from 1930 to 1932. Brüning never had a majority in the Reichstag and was dependent on President von Hindenburg and his authority under Article 48 to get measures through an increasingly hostile German parliament.

the power to implement laws by decree. This meant that the appointment of Brüning in March 1930 marked the end of parliamentary government in Germany as it had operated since 1919. It was the start of **presidential rule**. The shift to presidential rule and the abandonment of parliamentary government weakened those who had supported German democracy.

Brüning's economic policy

Brüning's response to the worsening economic situation was to follow a traditional deflationary policy. The government had to balance the budget by cutting expenditure and increasing taxes. In July he presented his budget to the Reichstag, proposing increased taxes and severe cuts in government spending and relief services.

Despite vigorous opposition from the socialists, communists and nationalists, Brüning believed that these harsh economic measures were necessary and he was not a man easily swayed by public opinion. When the Reichstag voted to reject his budget in July, Brüning had the president intervene and the budget was implemented by presidential decree under Article 48 of the constitution.

This was a significant step in the ultimate failure of German democracy. Despite the protest from the Reichstag, there was nothing illegal in what the chancellor did. Article 48 was intended to be used for any state of emergency, and Brüning argued that Germany's economic woes constituted a state of emergency. But the use of Article 48 caused an extended political emergency. Authority had been taken away from the elected German parliament and placed in the hands of the president. 'With this act and on this day,' wrote German historian Eberhard Kolb, 'there began the permanent violation of the constitutional system by the dictatorial powers of the Reich President.'⁵

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. At a time of serious economic crisis, it was inevitable 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.



Getty Images/Julstein bild DHL

Chancellor Heinrich Brüning addresses the Reichstag in April 1930

AN SPD MEMBER OF THE REICHSTAG OBJECTS TO THE USE OF ARTICLE 48

Article 48, according to its origin, its sense and its wording, is not an instrument for saving a government which has miscalculated. Article 48 cannot possibly be applied to pushing through laws which the Reichstag does not want to assent to ... that, Mr Chancellor, would be a dangerous game of which no one can say where and how it will end ... If under the present government it turns out to be impossible to pass the laws necessary for settling the Reich's finances and for securing social services then there results from that, Mr Chancellor, not the implementation of these laws through Article 48 but there results from that, first and foremost, the resignation of the government.

Wilhelm Keil, *Erlebnisse eines Sozialdemokraten*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1947, p. 390.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what the SPD member meant by the remark that Article 48 'is not an instrument for saving a government'.
- 2 In what way was the use of Article 48 in this case 'a dangerous game'?
- 3 What, according to the SPD member, should Chancellor Brüning do if he cannot get his budget passed by the Reichstag?



Hitler supporters stand next to an election poster that reads: 'Adolf Hitler will provide work and bread! Elect List 2!' Posted on the wall at the right are posters urging women and workers to support the Nazis.

The 1930 elections

With the Depression deepening and over 3 million people unemployed, the Nazi Party relished the opportunity that Brüning had provided by calling an election for September 1930.

In a vigorous campaign they projected themselves as the party of action. In hundreds of rallies and political meetings across the country, Hitler and the other Nazi leaders attacked the weaknesses 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 German people's resentment and frustration at a system that had apparently failed, and they promised a revitalisation of the will and a new beginning. Hitler's simple message of recovery had particular appeal to the disillusioned middle class, to small business operators and to the increasing number of the rural and farming population who suffered badly during 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 growing support from the long-suffering working class.

The Nazis were well 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 (from 2.6 per cent to 18.3 per cent of the vote). 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 them the third largest party in the Reichstag. The tragedy for Germany was that both of these political parties sought the overthrow of German democracy.

THE 1930 ELECTION RESULTS

SOURCE A: From the diary of Harry Clemens Ulrich Graf Kessler (1868–1937), German diplomat and writer

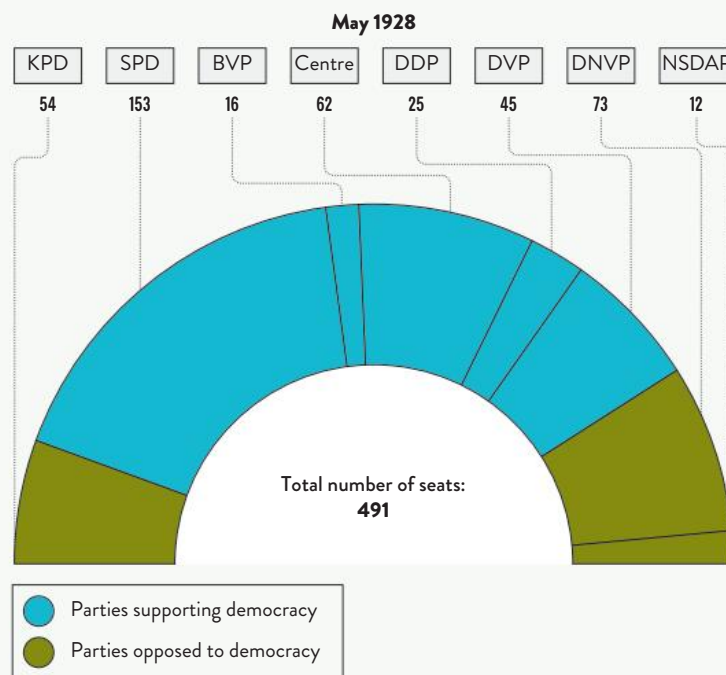
A black day for Germany. The Nazis have increased their representation tenfold ... the impression abroad is bound to be catastrophic, the aftermath ... will be dreadful. With 107 Nazis, 41 Hugenbergers and over 70 Communists that is to say some 220 deputies who radically reject the present German state and seek to overthrow it by revolutionary means, we are confronted by a political crisis which can only be mastered by the formation of a strong united front of all those forces which support or at least tolerate the Republic.

Harry Kessler, *Berlin in Lights, the Diaries of Count Harry Kessler 1918–1937*, Grove Press, New York, 2001, p. 381.

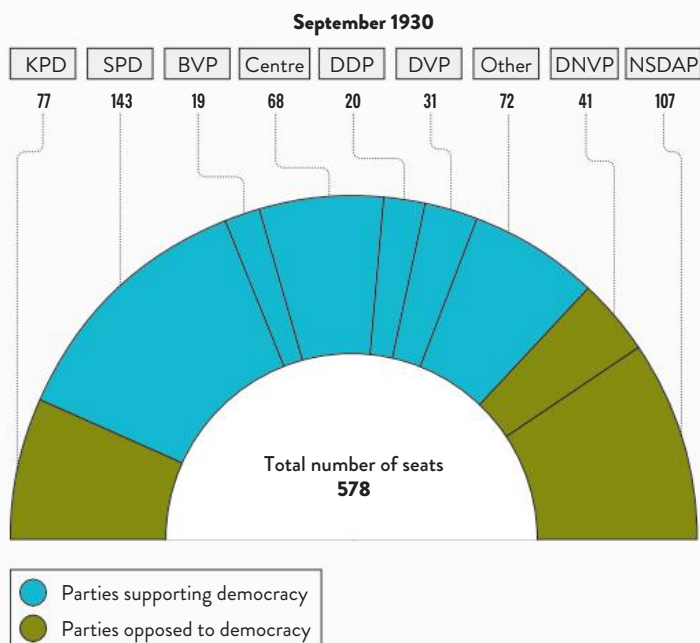
QUESTIONS

- 1 To which political party is Kessler referring to in his remark about '41 Hugenbergers'?
- 2 What do the three political parties identified by Kessler in this extract have in common?
- 3 What does Kessler believe is the best way forward to protect and preserve the German democracy?

SOURCE B: Comparison of Reichstag election results 1928 and 1930 by seats



Election results 1928



* 72 Seats to other parties, including regional and minor

Election results 1930

	May 1928 election 491 Reichstag seats	September 1930 election 578 Reichstag seats
Left-wing parties		
SPD	153	143
KPD	54	77
Catholic parties		
Centre	62	68
BVP	16	19
Middle-class parties		
DDP	25	20
DVP	45	31
Right-wing parties		
DNVP	73	41
NSDAP	12	107
Other	51	72

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 party probably benefited from:
 - i the decline in the Nationalist vote?
 - ii the decline in the SPD vote?
- 4 Which political party probably benefited from the drop-off in the vote for the middle-class parties (the DDP and the DVP)? Can you explain why?
- 5 From this data, what can you infer about the state of the German democracy?

SOURCE C: From *Der Angriff* (The Attack), a newspaper established in 1927 by Dr Joseph Goebbels

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 come as enemies. Like the wolf tearing into a flock of sheep, that is how we come!



Front page of *Der Angriff* (The Attack), a newspaper produced by Dr Joseph Goebbels. This edition, featuring a photo of Hitler campaigning, is from 1932.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point Dr Goebbels is making in this article. Is there evidence that he believed in legality?
- 2 If *Der Angriff* was so hostile to democracy, explain why it was allowed to be published.
- 3 How many came 'as enemies' after September 1930?



Nazi deputies wearing their distinctive brown shirts (top half of the photo) take their seats in the German Reichstag after the 1930 election. 'We come as enemies. Like the wolf tearing into a flock of sheep, that is how we come!' said Goebbels.

Brüning holds on to power

The aim of the Nazi Party was to destroy the German democracy – the Nazis came to the parliament not to debate, but to end debate. After the September 1930 elections the Reichstag was virtually unworkable, because the Nazis, the KPD and the 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 hardship caused to 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 policy and used Article 48 to have his measures implemented. There were new tax increases and

further cuts in wages and unemployment relief. Confidence in the German banking system declined when Germany's largest bank, the *Darmstädter und Nationalbank* (Danat Bank), collapsed. Food prices rose and unemployment continued to climb, reaching 4.6 million in October 1931.

The end of reparations

One of the factors contributing to Germany's economic problems was the continued burden of reparation payments. Brüning wanted to end these payments, and he believed that to achieve this goal Germany had to show the Allied powers that it was trying to deal with its economic problems. In June 1931 he achieved part of his goal when President Hoover of the United States proposed a one-year **moratorium** on reparation payments. A year later, in June 1932, the Allied powers decided to cancel reparation payments altogether. Brüning, however, had lost office a month before, so the credit for ending the payments went to his successor, Franz von Papen.

Re-electing the president, 1932

In 1932 Hindenburg's seven-year term as president of Germany neared its end. Brüning tried to have the Reichstag vote to extend Hindenburg's term by two years, believing that this would give him enough time to overcome the pressing economic and political problems. Not surprisingly, the Nazis and the Nationalists opposed the proposal.

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 and the *Stahlhelm*, who would normally have supported Hindenburg, ran their own candidate, Theodor Duesterberg. The communists once again put up Ernst Thälmann, who had stood in the 1925 presidential election, and after some delay Hitler also announced his intention to run.

The Nazis conducted another vigorous election campaign. The party membership, which now stood at 450 000, was activated under the organising hand of Dr Goebbels. In an intense three-week campaign, the party organised 30 meetings per day across the country. Hindenburg did not campaign – his declining health and his dignity did not permit it. Chancellor Brüning addressed election meetings on his behalf.

1932 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION POSTER



alg-images

SOURCE STUDY

A Nazi election poster for the 1932 presidential election. The caption reads: 'Front Soldiers German men and women. Give the answer. Hitler Reich President'.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why this Nazi poster depicts Hitler in his uniform as a World War I soldier
- 2 What particular feature of this uniform is given prominence, and why?
- 3 Discuss what particular messages the Nazis are seeking to convey by using this type of imagery.

In the election on 14 March no candidate received an absolute majority, so a second round of voting was scheduled for 10 April. To meet his heavy round of speaking engagements, Hitler became the first modern politician to take to the air, and he appeared in 21 cities in a week. Mass rallies were organised throughout the country. Hitler flew from one city to the next, speaking in as many as five cities in one day. Goebbels devised an appropriate slogan – *Hitler over Germany*. The second round of voting increased the Nazi vote, but not enough to grant Hitler victory. Hindenburg achieved 53 per cent of the vote, and at 83 years of age was re-elected president of Germany for another seven years.

The cover of a Nazi Party political pamphlet that detailed Hitler's 1932 election campaign for president



US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Randall Bytwerk

VOTING IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 1932

Round one, 14 March

Candidate	Number of votes	Percentage
Hindenburg	18 650 730	49.6%
Hitler (NSDAP)	11 339 285	30.1%
Thälmann (KPD)	4 983 197	13.0%
Duesterberg (DNVP)	2 558 000	6.8%

Round two, 10 April

Candidate	Number of votes	Percentage
Hindenburg	19 359 635	53%
Hitler (NSDAP)	13 418 051	36.8%
Thälmann (KPD)	3 706 655	10.2%

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why Hindenburg was unhappy that he was forced to endure a second round of voting.
- 2 Offer reasons why the KPD vote dropped in Round Two. Which candidates picked up some of this vote?
- 3 Why is it likely that the bulk of Duesterberg's vote in round one would have gone to Hitler in round two?
- 4 Which of the candidates for President of Germany supported democracy?

The role of the army in German politics

From the start of the Weimar Republic the army had preserved its influence and power within the nation. It had supported the Ebert government when it was threatened by the extreme left in 1919 and 1923, although it had been reluctant to support the republic against challenges from the right. During the 1920s, under the leadership of General von Seeckt, reforms and secret rearmament had set the foundation for a new German army. The German army was one of the forces that weakened the democratic system in the 1920s. The army leadership had never accepted the republican government, and followed its own policies almost regardless of what the government did.

After the election of Field Marshal von Hindenburg as president in 1925, the army leadership became more reconciled to the republic. The president himself took note of the army and of the military figures who had easy and regular access to him.

By the time of the Depression there was a growing belief among the army leadership that Germany needed to return to a stronger, more authoritarian government in order to deal with the increasing problems that confronted the nation. The old hostility towards the democratic system gave way to a determination by a number of senior army officers that the system had to be changed. The army's increased political activity 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 (communists) and the right (Nazis), and came to believe that Germany would once again find itself in a condition of revolutionary disturbance not unlike the period of 1918–1919. If such a situation was to re-emerge, there was the possibility of civil war, which would force the army to become involved.



General von Schleicher

The leading military figure who actively engaged in politics was General Kurt von Schleicher. By 1930 Schleicher had emerged as one of the most influential political figures in Germany. He was responsible for a special agency within the defence department, the *Ministeramt* (Ministerial Service), which was the point of contact between the army and the political parties. More importantly, he was a friend and adviser to the president, and he enjoyed the exercise of political power and political intrigue.

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. 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 to seek 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. 'The military politicians,' writes the historian Gordon Craig, 'lacked the will to take responsibility boldly and openly into their hands. They preferred to operate through agents like Brüning and later von Papen, whom they could control and whom they could dispose of when they had served their usefulness. This was a difficult game at best and they weren't very good at it. In the end they lost heart and their last agent, Hitler, became their master.'⁶

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 opposing the state into one that supported it. He foolishly believed that once the Nazis had been given a share of power their extremism would be modified. The Nazis, he observed, were 'not very decent chaps,' but 'must be stomached with the greatest caution. If they did not exist we would certainly have to invent them.'⁷ Schleicher's reward was to be shot by the Nazis in 1934.



Getty Images/Julstein bild Dtl.

German chancellor for two months before Hitler's victory in January 1933, General Kurt von Schleicher enjoyed political intrigue and the exercise of power. He and his wife were murdered by the Nazis in 1934.

Brüning betrayed, May 1932

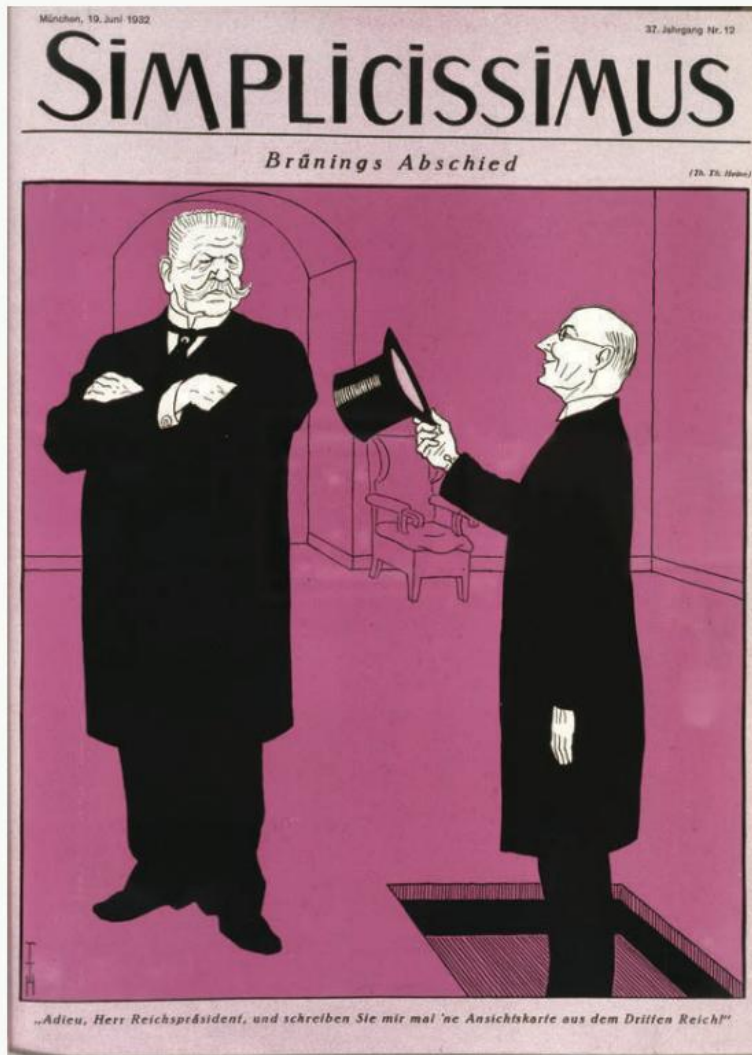
Once Hindenburg had been safely returned as president, General von Schleicher began moves to have Brüning removed. Schleicher had proposed Brüning as chancellor in March 1930, believing that Germany needed a stronger, more authoritarian government. But Brüning had failed to remedy Germany's economic 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 now needed in order to win their support.

A few days after the presidential elections, the Defence Minister, General Groener, had finally moved to ban the SA and the SS on account of their violent behaviour. Working on the fears and

uncertainties of the old president, Schleicher and others convinced Hindenburg that Brüning was no longer acceptable, that he had moved too far to the left, and that the ban on the SA and the SS had unsettled the army. At the end of the month, in an act of great political betrayal, President von Hindenburg asked Brüning for his resignation. Brüning had been chancellor for more than two years, surviving only because he had the support of the President. In May 1932 President von Hindenburg decided to withdraw that support.

THE DISMISSAL OF HEINRICH BRÜNING, 1932

SOURCE STUDY



bpk / Kunstbibliothek, SMB / Knud Petersen

A cartoon from the magazine *Simplicissimus*, 19 June 1932. The caption reads: 'Goodbye Mr President. Write me a postcard from the Third Reich!'

QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify the figures and the event depicted in this cartoon.
- 2 Why did President von Hindenburg dismiss Brüning from office?
- 3 Explain the meaning of Brüning's comment in this cartoon.
- 4 Do you think that the actions of Chancellor Brüning, during his time as chancellor, helped or hindered the rise 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 parliament – it now lay in the hands of the elderly president and his circle. These men now set up the next government – one led by Franz von Papen, a former member of the Centre Party. Conservative, charming and wealthy, von 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’.⁸ Schleicher privately observed that he was a hat without a head.

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. The Socialists (SPD) and the German National People’s Party (DNVP) opposed Papen, and the Centre, the German Democratic Party (DDP) and the German People’s Party (DVP), furious at the way Brüning had been dumped, also refused to support him. 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’.⁹ Political power had moved from the elected Reichstag upwards, to the president, who could use the powers given to him under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution to effectively rule by decree.

Reichstag elections, July 1932

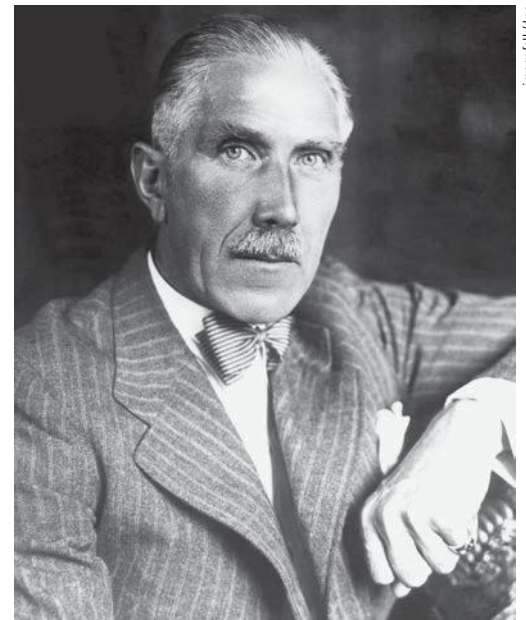
To support Papen, Schleicher had renewed his contact with the Nazis and secured an understanding from Hitler that they would ‘cooperate’ with the new government if the ban on the SA and the SS was lifted, and if new elections were called. Papen agreed. The ban was lifted, the Reichstag was dissolved 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 could only gain ground in another election.

The election campaign of July 1932 was vigorous and violent. Street clashes between Nazi stormtroopers and communists increased, with 86 people killed in street fights 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 more than 200 injured. Twelve people were killed in street violence on the election day itself.

The Nazi Party was well prepared for these elections, and once again Hitler took to the air, visiting more than 50 cities. He returned to his constant themes of the 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.



Franz von Papen



imagefolk/dpa

Franz von Papen (1879–1969), German chancellor in 1932, helped put Hitler into power in 1933. He served the Nazi movement after 1933 and was sentenced to 20 years in prison at the end of the war.



Bridgeman Images/Granger

A Nazi election poster for the July 1932 elections. The poster reads: ‘Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future. Save the German family. Vote Adolf Hitler!’

ADOLF HITLER PRE-ELECTION RADIO BROADCAST, 15 JULY 1932

The German peasant has become impoverished; the middle class is ruined; the social hopes of many millions of people are destroyed; one third of all German men and women of working age is unemployed and thus without income; the Reich, the communities, and the states are over indebted; finances are in a muddle across the board; and all the coffers are empty. ... The worst thing, though, is the destruction of the faith in our Volk, the elimination of all hopes and all confidence ...

Now, after thirteen years, after they have destroyed everything in Germany, the time has finally arrived for their own elimination. Whether or not today's parliamentary parties exist or not is of no consequence; what is, however, necessary is that the German nation be prevented from falling completely into ruin ...

Thirteen years ago we National Socialists were mocked and derided – today our opponents' laughter has turned to tears. A faithful community of people has arisen ... resolved to take up the fight for the preservation of our race, not because it is made up of Bavarians or Prussians or men from Württemberg or Saxony; not because they are Catholics or Protestants, workers or civil servants, bourgeois or salaried workers, but because all of them are Germans.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Hitler mean by 'our Volk'?
- 2 Explain Hitler's phrase, 'Now after thirteen years ... they have destroyed everything in Germany'.
- 3 Which groups in German society in 1932 may have agreed with elements of this radio speech?
- 4 How would this source be useful for a historian studying Nazi propaganda?

The election result was a staggering victory for the Nazis. They won 37.4 per cent of the vote and more than doubled their representation in the Reichstag, from 108 to 230 seats. In a free election 13.7 million Germans had voted for the Nazis. They were now the largest political party in the Reichstag. The communists increased their representation to 89 seats, while Papen was left with just 44 seats in a Reichstag of 608.

Hitler is refused power, August 1932

The election of July 1932 increased the strength of the Nazis 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, but Hindenburg still refused to appoint Hitler as chancellor. The president had developed a personal dislike for Hitler at their few meetings, calling him a 'queer fellow' and jokingly suggesting that he might make a good Minister for Posts.¹⁰

After the election Schleicher had hoped to bring the Nazis in to support the government, but the conservatives were not prepared to give Hitler control. On 13 August, Hitler was offered the position of vice-chancellor and reminded of his promise to 'cooperate' with the existing government. Hitler rejected the offer, demanding nothing less than the chancellorship. That night a dejected Goebbels wrote in his diary, 'Nothing is more difficult than to tell victory-flushed troops that victory has been snatched out of their hands.'

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

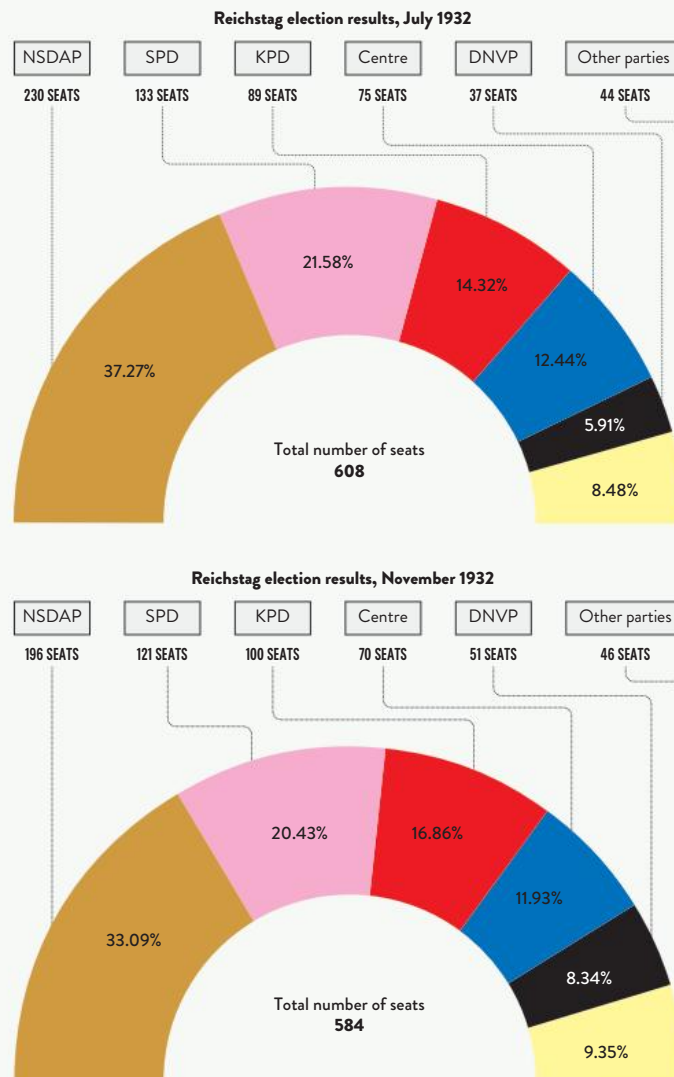
Reichstag elections, November 1932

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. 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 to 32 per cent, and 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 51, but the real winners were the communists (KPD), who increased their representation from 89 to 100 seats.

THE ELECTIONS OF JULY AND NOVEMBER 1932

SOURCE A: Election results



SOURCE B: The opinion of Dr Wilhelm Külz of the German Democratic Party

Looked at politically, objectively, the result of the election is so fearful because it seems that the present election will be the last normal Reichstag election for a long time to come ... The elected Reichstag is totally incapable of functioning ...

If things are faced squarely and soberly the situation is such that more than half the German people have declared themselves against the present state, but have not said what sort of state they would accept ... As the lesser of many evils to be feared, I think, would be the open assumption of dictatorship by the present government.

The one consolation could be the recognition that the Nazis have passed their peak since ... they have declined in most constituencies, but against this stands the fact that the radicalism of the right has unleashed a strong radicalism of the left. The communists have made gains almost everywhere.

Dr Wilhelm Külz, Former Minister of the Interior in the Weimar Republic and member of the German Democratic Party, quoted in Herbert Michaelis et al. (ed.), *Ursachen und Folgen*, vol. 7, Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 324.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Does the evidence in Source A support or refute the comment in Source B that 'more than half the German people have declared themselves against the present state'. Justify your answer.
- 2 Why did the KPD vote increase?
- 3 Explain why the author of Source B can support the observation that 'The one consolation could be the recognition that the Nazis have passed their peak'.
- 4 With reference to Sources A and B, account for the 1932 electoral results.

Hitler is refused power, November 1932

Papen was encouraged by the election results and the fall in the Nazi vote, but he still had no political support in the Reichstag, and led a presidential cabinet totally dependent on the authority of the president to pass legislation.

Once again Hitler asked for the position of chancellor, and once again Hindenburg refused. 'A Presidential Cabinet led by you,' Hindenburg wrote to Hitler, 'would inevitably develop into a party dictatorship with all the consequences of drastic intensification of the antagonism within the German nation.'¹¹

The fall of Papen, December 1932

Papen believed that since a national emergency existed, extraordinary measures were now needed. On 1 December 1932, he proposed to the president that the Reichstag be suspended and that Hindenburg should assume direct rule until the immediate crisis was past. 'The situation is so serious,' he wrote, 'that I considered the President might be justified in placing the welfare of the nation above his oath to the constitution ... I reminded him [Hindenburg] of the manner in which Bismarck had once found it necessary to recommend to the Prussian monarch that the constitution should be ignored for the sake of the country.'¹²

However, Schleicher had already decided that Papen had failed. He was worried about the failed economy, with unemployment nearing 6 million, he was concerned about the increasing strength of the communists, and he disliked Papen's close friendship with the president. Schleicher was

convinced that some arrangement had to be made with the Nazis, and that there was a prospect of civil war if Papen shut down the Reichstag and ignored political reality.

In the same way that he had removed Brüning after the election of April 1932, Schleicher now moved to remove Papen. He persuaded the president that the army had lost confidence in Papen, and pointed out 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, appointed Schleicher as the new chancellor.

THE COMMUNISTS AND THE NAZIS

The communists' violent reactionary rhetoric promising the destruction of capitalism and the creation of a Soviet Germany terrified the country's middle classes who knew only too well what had happened to their counterparts in Russia after 1918. Appalled at the failure of the government to solve the crisis, and frightened into desperation by the rise of the communists ... they began to gravitate towards the Nazis. While the middle-class parties collapsed completely, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Centre Party managed to restrict their losses. But by 1932 they were all that was left of the moderate centre, squashed helplessly between 100 uniformed communists and 196 brown-shirted deputies in the Reichstag.

Richard J Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, p. 9.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are the main points being made by the British historian Richard Evans in this extract?
- 2 Write an extended paragraph explaining why by 1932 the parties that had supported the German democracy were 'squashed helplessly between 100 uniformed communists and 196 brown-shirted deputies in the Reichstag'.

Hitler and the German industrialists

The leaders of German big business never supported the republic. Many had a sympathy for the old days of Imperial Germany, and they had a natural preference for a more authoritarian style of government, rather than the liberal parliamentary system. They distrusted the socialists and feared the communists.

Although the industrialists never supported the republic, they never lost their influence, and throughout the Weimar period they remained a powerful, privileged elite in German society. Their business interests did well, particularly in the prosperous years after 1923.

There is little historical evidence that the major German industrialists supported the



The men who had the power: a political meeting at Hindenburg's country home at Neudeck in 1932. Clockwise from left: Reich Chancellor von Papen, Wilhelm von Gayl (a member of the Papen cabinet), President von Hindenburg, Kurt von Schleicher and Otto Meißner.

Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Nazi movement to any significant degree before late 1932. Although some individual industrialists, such as Fritz Thyssen and Emil Kirdorf, did support the Nazis and made financial contributions to the party, most did not. The industrialists were attracted by the Nazi image of discipline and order, by their promise to restore German national honour and by their opposition to communism, but they remained suspicious of the party's radicalism and the left wing of the party, which promoted the socialist element of the Nazi program.

In January 1932 the Ruhr industrialist Fritz Thyssen arranged for Hitler to address the leaders of German industry at the Düsseldorf *Industrie-club*. Hitler gave an impressive performance. He traded his brown uniform for a conservative business suit and assured the leaders of German industry that they had nothing to fear from the Nazi movement.

But despite the good impression that Hitler made, German business still preferred to back the conservative parties. They backed Hindenburg against Hitler in the presidential elections, and they gave significant support to Papen, whose government in 1932 included influential figures from German industry. Some industrialists began to make donations to the Nazi Party, but there was no significant flow of financial support. Indeed, after the four election campaigns of 1932 the party was in severe financial trouble.

It was only in late 1932 that big business began to support the Nazi movement. This was largely due to the fall of Papen and the appointment of General von Schleicher as chancellor. German industry had supported Papen, but they had an intense distrust of Schleicher, concerned by his close links with the trade unions and the working class. There was a fear that Schleicher might seek to establish a link between the military and the workers, and that he may have been a 'socialist in military garb'.¹³

The failure of Schleicher, December 1932

Schleicher survived as chancellor for only two months. He tried to bring the Nazis into government by doing a deal with Gregor Strasser, the leader of the Nazi Party in the Reichstag. In a clumsy attempt to split the Nazis, Schleicher offered Strasser the position of vice-chancellor. Hitler responded with fury. Displaying decisive leadership, he forbade any deals with Schleicher and ordered all Nazis in the Reichstag to 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.

At the end of 1932 there was a mood of doubt and despair in the Nazi Party. Despite their 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.'¹⁴

The final deal, January 1933

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 trying to get rid of Schleicher.

Papen was motivated by his desire to return to power and the prospect 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, bringing Hitler in to create a conservative, nationalist, anti-democratic government.

On 4 January 1933 Papen and Hitler met secretly in Cologne at the home of the German banker Baron von Schröder. A series of other secret meetings followed, which also included Hindenburg's son, Oskar, and his close adviser Otto Meißner. Papen's plan was for a coalition government of

Nazis, the German National People's Party (DNVP) and his own conservative supporters. This government, unlike any government since Müller in 1930, would have a majority in the Reichstag.

The final difficulty was to convince the president. Considerable pressure was brought to bear on Hindenburg. 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 field marshal, who had never supported the republic or the democracy, became its final guardian. What finally moved the president were the arrangements that Papen and the others had set up.

- ◆ Hitler would be appointed chancellor and Papen vice-chancellor.
- ◆ The vice-chancellor was to be present whenever the president met with the chancellor.
- ◆ Of the eleven cabinet posts, only three would go to the Nazis.
- ◆ The other cabinet posts would be held by the conservative supporters of Papen.
- ◆ The key portfolio of Minister for Economics would be held by Hugenberg, the leader of the German National People's Party (DNVP).
- ◆ Hindenburg's own choice of General von Blomberg would become Minister of Defence.

RECOLLECTIONS OF HINDENBURG'S STATE SECRETARY, OTTO MEISSNER

In the latter part of January, Papen played an increasingly important role in the house of the Reich President, but despite Papen's persuasions, Hindenburg was extremely hesitant, until the end of January, to make Hitler chancellor. He wanted to have Papen chancellor. Papen finally won him over to Hitler with the argument that the representatives of the other right-wing parties which would belong to the government would restrict Hitler's freedom of action. In addition, Papen expressed his misgivings that, if the present opportunity were again missed, a revolt of the National Socialist and civil war were likely.

Otto Meissner, Testimony at the Nuremberg Tribunal, 1947.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify one of the 'other right-wing parties' that may 'restrict Hitler's freedom of action'.
- 2 According to this extract, what are the two arguments Papen uses to persuade Hindenburg to appoint Hitler chancellor?
- 3 With reference to the source, explain why Hitler was appointed Chancellor in 1933.

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.'¹⁵

On 28 January 1933 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.' Schleicher replied, 'After this breach of confidence, Your Excellency, I would not be too sure that you will go to heaven.'¹⁶

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.



President von Hindenburg appoints Hitler chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933.



Crowds throng outside President von Hindenburg's residence in Berlin, awaiting Hitler's departure shortly after his appointment as chancellor on 30 January 1933.



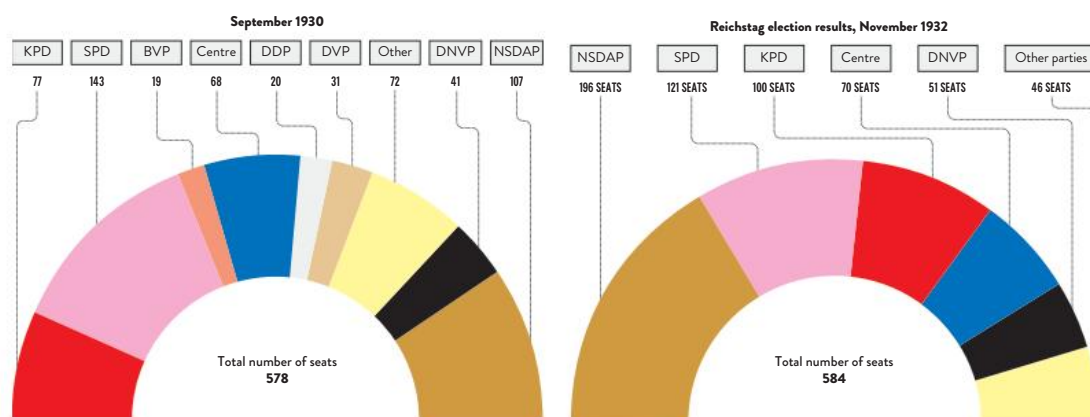
A torchlight procession of Hitler's SA along the Charlottenburg Chaussee, through the Brandenburg Gate to Wilhelmsstrasse, on the evening of 30 January 1933 to celebrate Hitler's coming to power

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS TO 1932

- ◆ The impact of the Great Depression was particularly severe in Germany.
- ◆ Heinrich Brüning became chancellor in March 1930, and adopted a deflationary economic policy.
- ◆ Brüning relied on the support of the president and Article 48 to carry out his economic program. This was the start of presidential government, with the Reichstag effectively being bypassed.
- ◆ The election in September 1930 saw an electoral breakthrough for the Nazis, who increased their seats in the Reichstag from 12 to 107.
- ◆ President von Hindenburg was re-elected president in April 1932. Hitler also ran for the presidency and won 13.5 million votes.
- ◆ The fall of the Brüning government and the appointment of Franz von Papen as chancellor in May 1932 were mainly the work of General von Schleicher.
- ◆ New elections in July 1932 increased the Nazi vote, giving them 230 seats in the Reichstag and making them the largest party in the German parliament.
- ◆ Papen governed with the use of Article 48 and the support of the president. New Reichstag elections in November 1932 saw a small drop in the Nazi vote.
- ◆ Papen was dismissed in December 1932. General 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 the German National People's Party (DNVP) into government as part of a coalition with themselves. They believed they could control Hitler.
- ◆ Hindenburg was persuaded to overcome his opposition to Hitler, and on 30 January 1933 he legally appointed him chancellor of Germany, with Papen as vice-chancellor.

- 1 Explain how each of the following helped Hitler come to power
 - i Article 48
 - ii The Reichstag election of September 1930
 - iii The Germans industrialists
 - iv The Great Depression
- 2 Create a flow chart or cartoon strip that shows how Hitler came to power between 1929 and 1933.
- 3 Class discussion: 'Not appointing Hitler as Chancellor in 1932 was anti-democratic'. Do you agree?
- 4 It has been argued that Hitler never seized power in 1933 but rather, that it was handed to him by individuals who seriously underestimated him. Select one of the following individuals and outline how they assisted Hitler into power.
 - A Paul von Hindenburg
 - B Franz von Papen
 - C Kurt von Schleicher

- 5 Based on the evidence from these two pie charts showing the Reichstag election results of September 1930 and July 1932, which of the following statements are true and which are false?
- A The Socialists lost political support between 1930 and 1932.
 - B The parties opposed to the democratic system gained in strength between 1930 and 1932.
 - C A coalition between the Nazis and the German National People's Party (DNVP) would have the numbers to form a government in 1932.
 - D The Centre Party had a relatively stable element of support from 1930 to 1932.
 - E The minor political parties all lost political ground from 1930 to 1932.



6.3

THE FAILURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

Why the Nazis finally came to power in 1933 remains a complex issue, but part of the answer can be found in the reasons the democratic system of the Weimar Republic collapsed. There were long-term factors at work that weakened the democratic system and tested the German people's confidence in their republic. There were also more immediate, short-term factors, such as the impact of the Depression, which provided the setting for the republic's failure.

Lack of a democratic tradition

Unlike Britain, France and the United States, Germany never experienced a true liberal democratic revolution. There was no German equivalent to the American or French revolutions of the eighteenth century, which gave new meaning to the concepts of liberty, equality and the rights of the individual. Instead, Germany had a tradition of strong rulers, a dominant military and a powerful conservative governing elite. German liberalism was always overshadowed by the force of German nationalism and the need for German unity. Germany became a united nation in 1871 as an expression of German power, not as the result of a struggle for individual freedom.

In 1918 the nation collapsed in military defeat and a condition of the peace was that Germany had to accept a democratic system. As the old order was swept away, democracy was imposed on a country with little experience of the democratic process. For many Germans it was a foreign concept,

and it remained so. As the republic suffered humiliation, political disorder, violence and economic hardship, more and more Germans closed their minds to the idea of democracy. It was always easy to blame the hardship and distress on the democratic system.

Flaws in the constitution

In 1918, almost overnight, Germany was transformed from an authoritarian state to one of the most democratic states in the world. The new constitution of 1919 guaranteed the basic rights of the German people, but it also had weaknesses that undermined the functioning of the democracy.

The voting system of proportional representation was one such weakness. Proportional representation enabled small political parties to gain representation in the Reichstag. This encouraged political instability and frequent elections, and meant no party ever had a majority of seats – every one of the 21 Weimar governments was a coalition government.

The constitution also gave great power and influence to the president. Article 48 of the constitution allowed the president to rule by decree if the political system failed to function. This emergency power was intended to protect the democracy in times of crisis, but in fact it became one of the methods used to overthrow democracy. Between 1919 and 1923 President Ebert resorted to Article 48 on 135 occasions, and after 1930, when the parliamentary government failed, President von Hindenburg used it almost continuously, until he appointed Hitler as chancellor.

These constitutional weaknesses and others were constantly attacked by the enemies of the democratic system. In the words of the great German historian Friedrich Meinecke, who lived through these years, 'the Weimar Constitution was destroyed in the dinner clubs'.¹⁷ The constitution may have served the republic better if it had not reserved such power for the president, if the system had produced fewer political parties in the Reichstag, if it had defined more exactly the sharing of powers between the German states and the central government, and if it had not provided such a tolerant and liberal environment, in which the aggressive enemies of democracy such as the Nazis could use the system to attack and finally destroy it.

Powerful opponents

After Germany became a republic in 1918, the Weimar governments made little attempt to deal with the powerful elements within the country that were openly opposed to the republic. A number of key agencies of the state, including the civil service, the judiciary and the education system, remained very much in the hands of men whose loyalty was to the old Germany. They remained hostile to both the republic and the democracy. Weimar governments failed to bring these bases of power under control. It was a mistake that the Nazis did not make. When they came to power, these important institutions of the state were brought firmly under the control of the Nazi Party.

The privileged elites also preserved both their status and their power in republican Germany. These elites included the Prussian landed aristocracy, the industrialists and the army. Members of these groups were some of the most vigorous opponents of the republic and the concept of democracy, yet they all survived and prospered under the republican system. The Junker landowning class maintained their position, the industrialists grew richer, and the army, which tolerated the republic, preserved its status and reputation. The activities of these conservative groups consistently worked against the survival of Germany as a liberal democracy.

Psychological disillusionment

From the beginning the Weimar Republic was associated with all that was wrong with postwar Germany. The series of disasters that afflicted Germany, particularly before 1923, had an impact on all Germans, who contrasted the stability, progress and great standing of pre-war Germany with the instability and international dishonour of Weimar Germany. An entire generation of Germans had

been uprooted and disinherited. The republic was forever associated with the much-hated Treaty of Versailles, which remained a symbol of shame and defeat until Hitler erased its provisions after 1934. From the treaty there was the emotional issue of war guilt and the burden of reparations. Soon after, there was the humiliation of the 1923 Ruhr occupation and the devastation of the hyperinflation.

A cluster of misfortunes plagued Germany after 1918, and these crises weakened the confidence of many Germans in the republic. They became disillusioned with the new system and found it hard to reconcile themselves to it. The historian Friedrich Meinecke observed that, for true Germans, loyalty to the Fatherland required disloyalty to the republic. In a sense, the Weimar Republic was a democracy without democrats.

The failure of the party system

The frustration that many Germans felt towards the republic found expression in political violence and movements such as the Freikorps, and in a loss of faith in the party system. Of the political parties of the Weimar Republic only two (the SPD and the Centre Party) supported the concept of the republic. At the extreme left and the extreme right, the communists and the Nazis never accepted parliamentary democracy and sought to destroy it. A feature of a functioning democracy is an opposition that supports the system. But in the Weimar Republic the opposition was, to a great extent, opposed to both the republic and the democracy.

THE FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY

SOURCE STUDY

The Weimar Republic ... had hardly ever been faced with a genuine opposition — only, or almost only, with fanatical enemies. An opposition keeps within the framework of the State ... The enemies of the Republic refused to accept the State as such from the outset. They professed to stand outside it while enjoying every advantage conferred by a democratic constitution.

Hermann Mau and Helmut Krausnick, *German History 1933–1945*, Oswald Wolf, London, 1959, p. 13.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the difference between “a genuine opposition” and “fanatical enemies”? Give an example of each.
- 2 List some of the advantages that were ‘conferred by a democratic constitution’ on the ‘enemies of the Republic’.

Historical assessments

‘Historiography’ refers to the study of historical writing or, more precisely, the explanations and interpretations of historians. In another sense it is a study of how and why historians agree and disagree over historical events. To look at the historiography of how Hitler came to power, for example, is to explore the different interpretations historians offer to explain the event. In doing this, we add to our own knowledge and challenge our thinking on the topic.

Quite often historians can be placed into different groupings depending on the argument they are presenting. For example, one group of historians will argue that, given the events in Germany, Hitler’s rise to power was ‘inevitable’; another group of historians, with much the same evidence, may argue that there was nothing inevitable about it at all.

Historiography is also influenced by generational change. Historians writing immediately after the war and into the 1960s and 1970s may see German history differently to a new generation of historians writing in the twenty-first century, who never knew the Nazi era. The British historian Ian Kershaw, one of the new generation, has used the term 'Hitler Youth Generation' to describe the earlier generation of historians. They were born in the late twenties or early thirties, were old enough to have experienced as teenagers the destruction wrought by the Nazi regime, trained in historical scholarship during the 1950s, and became the leading figures in the profession during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸ This generation of historians may not have had access to all the historical materials. In more recent times, with the reunification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union, vast amounts of new material has become available, which earlier-generation historians never saw. In this sense our interpretation and explanation of historical events can always change.

The 14 years of the Weimar Republic are of great interest to historians as they seek to explain how a civilised and cultured nation such as Germany lost its democracy to a force as barbarous as the Nazi movement. Until fairly recently there was a tendency to see the Weimar era merely as a prelude to the Nazi era. Not surprisingly, historians tended to focus a great deal of attention on the final phase of the republic, especially after 1929, as they sought reasons for its fall.

In more recent times, however, historians have moved away from seeing the Weimar era as just a prelude to Nazism, preferring to consider the entire period as they seek to explain its collapse. Much of this research centres on three key questions:

- ◆ Were the republic and German democracy doomed from the start?
- ◆ Did the democracy have a chance but collapse in the face of continued challenges, including the Depression and the Nazi movement?
- ◆ If the republic was doomed to failure, was Nazism the inevitable replacement?

Historians on the failure of Weimar

Many historians have argued that the Weimar Republic suffered from a number of structural weaknesses from the start, and that the failure of German democracy was, in a sense, inevitable. These structural weaknesses include:

- ◆ the role of privileged groups, including the industrialists and the army, who maintained their influence in the republic
- ◆ the authoritarian tradition in German history
- ◆ the lack of a long-established democratic tradition
- ◆ the weaknesses in the constitutional and party system
- ◆ the fact that, from the start, the republic faced political, economic and international issues, which weakened confidence and acceptance.

As a consequence, the Weimar Republic was unable to gain legitimate acceptance; it failed not so much because of its enemies, but rather, its lack of friends.

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

British historian Richard Bessel believes that the seriousness of Germany's economic problems meant there was little prospect for long-term economic reform. As a consequence, rather than winning political support, the republic continued to alienate important groups in German society. Historian Karl Bracher places great importance on the failure of the SPD to establish the democracy on a firm footing in 1918. The SPD failed to deal with elements such as the army and the privileged elites from pre-war Germany, who held their position and their influence after 1918 and remained enemies of the democracy.

If Ebert and the SPD missed opportunities to consolidate the democracy, one of the consequences was that, from the start, the Weimar Republic lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many Germans. The democracies that survived the crisis of the Depression were Britain, the United States, France and a number of other European states that had a long history of democracy. In these countries the system was never seriously questioned, and the opposition groups did not seek to change it.

This was not the case in Germany, where democracy was something relatively new and alien. What was needed was a more complete social revolution to end the influence of those who opposed the republic and the democracy. Leaders such as Ebert have faced criticism for not bringing this about. Groups such as the Nazis who opposed the republic were not genuine opposition groups, as in a democracy, but in fact were fanatical enemies who refused to accept the state. Many Germans had no real attachment to democracy; they saw it as an imported product, implanted in Germany under Allied pressure in 1919. This created the distinct possibility that an alternative to the democratic system could emerge, and this is exactly what happened.

Eminent German historian Hans Mommsen, in his book *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (1998), sees the real enemies of the Weimar Republic in the conservative ruling classes, the industrialists and financiers, aristocrats and army officers, state officials and conservative-minded professionals who 'with their unrelenting assaults on Weimar democracy, their various schemes to overturn the constitutional order and replace it with an authoritarian dictatorship, were ultimately responsible for the death of the republic.'¹⁹

Alternative views

Other historians, while accepting that there were structural weaknesses, do not believe that the republic was doomed from the start. German historian Eberhard Kolb is one such scholar. The Weimar Republic, he suggests, was in fact very resilient. It survived the challenges to 1923, and from 1924 to 1929 the Weimar Republic appeared to have overcome the early problems and enjoyed a measure of stability and economic growth. 'The Nazi seizure of power was not objectively inevitable even after the summer of 1932,' writes Kolb, '... but given the degree to which the constitution had been undermined, the trend towards a Hitler solution was unquestionably very strong from then on'.²⁰

German historian Detlev Peukert, in his book *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (1987), offers another insight into the Weimar era. The Weimar era, according to Peukert, launched Germany into what he called modernity – it became a modern state. Peukert believes that the failure of German democracy and the rise of the Nazis were not inevitable; Germany was not doomed from the start. What happened was that, over time, the democracy was steadily weakened by its progressive failure to gain acceptance and legitimacy in the eyes of people. This failure was made more evident by Germany's economic struggles, the divisions within different levels of German society and by the nation's struggle to face the changes and challenges of modernisation.

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 economic challenges could have been dealt with if there had been capable and strong political leadership. Holtfrerich has argued that what the republic lacked when it was most needed was political leadership. There was no lack of options in dealing with the Depression, just a 'lack of determination'.

The historian Knut Borchardt, another leading German scholar, has argued that Germany was unable to cope with the Great Depression because, even in the good years from 1924 to 1929, the country had serious economic problems. These included a high level of foreign debt, very high wage levels for German workers, the powerful influence of the German trade union movement and Germany's inability to substantially increase its export trade. Historians who have examined these 'middle years' have asked why Germany missed the opportunity to consolidate the republic and place the democracy on a firmer footing, and why it was unable to take measures to lessen the full impact of the Great Depression after 1929.

When the Depression came, Germany was incapable of putting economic policies into effect (such as those in the United States) that may have reduced the impact of the Depression. Once the Depression took hold, Borchardt suggests, there was no hope for the survival of German democracy.

There is no one cause that explains the failure of German democracy by 1933, and it is wrong to suggest that the Weimar Republic failed because of the Nazis. The failure of the Weimar Republic was a process, not an event. Hitler was a factor in the process, but not the only factor. It could be argued that the revival of the Nazi movement from the time of the Depression was not the cause of the failure of the republic but rather, a consequence of that failure.



Failure of German democracy

Weimar Germany: an assessment

There is now a far more sympathetic understanding of the problems facing German leaders in the 1920s, and the difficulties they encountered in trying to deal with them. Rather than apportioning blame, historians now seek to explain the great tensions and the enduring divisions which made the achievement of political stability so difficult and to give credit for the advances that were made ... At national, regional, and local levels men and women from all social classes were encouraged to participate actively in the political system. Welfare schemes were greatly expanded and both sexes, young and old could enjoy a wide range of social and cultural activities. Weimar Germany was a society in transition, a society that was experiencing the pressures of modernisation and of industrialisation. In the last analysis the newly established democratic structure was not strong enough to cope effectively with the underlying pressures when they were reinforced by new social and economic tensions arising from war and defeat.

Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 84.

HISTORIAN STUDY

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point being made in this extract.
- 2 In what way was Weimar society 'a society in transition'? How did that cause some Germans to have less faith in the democratic system?

THE GERMAN DEMOCRACY

- ◆ There were many causes for the failure of German democracy from 1919 to 1933, of which the activities of the Nazi Party were one.
- ◆ The Nazis and the German communists both came to destroy German democracy.
- ◆ Some historians believe that the structural weaknesses of the Weimar Republic made its failure inevitable.
- ◆ Other historians believe that, given changed circumstances, the Weimar Republic and German democracy could have survived. They believe there was nothing inevitable about Hitler coming to power in 1933, and that almost right to the end this could have been avoided.

6.3 SUMMARY

- 1 In a brief paragraph, explain why many Germans had difficulty accepting a democratic system.
- 2 Which groups in German society before 1933 did not accept the concept of a parliamentary democracy? Select one of these groups and explain what type of government system they would have preferred.

6.3 QUESTIONS

6.4

WHY DID THE NAZIS COME TO POWER?

The victory of Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933 was one of the most significant historical events of the twentieth century. 'The twelve years of Hitler's rule permanently changed Germany, Europe and the world,' writes the British historian Ian Kershaw. '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.'²¹ Like most significant events in history, there is no simple explanation for it.

There were many reasons for the failure of the Weimar Republic, and the Nazis were one of those reasons. However, explaining the failure of Weimar Germany does not in itself explain why Hitler and the Nazis succeeded. Certainly, the Nazis took full advantage of the weaknesses of the Weimar Republic. They skilfully and ruthlessly played on these weaknesses, but they did not create them. They exploited the crises that befell the republic, particularly the Depression, but they did not create these crises.

Many serious historians 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 that led to 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 nationalist 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 the vagueness of the party program worked to their benefit. Nazism was, in reality, a very negative movement. It developed out of all that was wrong with postwar Germany.

It was a nationalist movement that thrived in conditions of hardship and disorder. As the Nazis railed against weak democratic governments, economic chaos, the defeat of 1918 and subsequent 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 appeal.

The movement also displayed great skill in playing on a variety of emotions, and appealing to particular groups.

- ◆ Many 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.



Who supported Hitler?

NATIONALIST APPEAL

Their belief in a strong revitalised Germany, and their opposition to the Treaty of Versailles

NAZI PARTY TACTICS

- The use of violence
- The insistence of legality
- Propaganda

WHY DID THE NAZIS GAIN MASS FOLLOWING?

THE ROLE OF HITLER

- His own abilities as the leader of the party
- The image of Hitler as a man set apart and working for the national revival
- Hitler's opportunism and his ability to exploit the weakness of others

THE MISCALCULATION OF OTHERS

The ability of Nazis to exploit the weaknesses of their opponents

BROAD-BASED APPEAL IN GERMAN SOCIETY

The Nazis became the only political party that developed a broad appeal to different classes of society. This appeal came to include middle-class Germans who looked for order and stability, the working class, civil servants, rural Germany, those who feared the advance of communism, the young and idealists, and elite groups of army officers and industrialists

WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES GAVE HITLER POWER?

The economic suffering and unemployment caused by the Great Depression after 1929

Democracy had become discredited with the failure of the Weimar political system

The Nazis stayed within the legal system and sought power within the constitution (a lesson learnt after the Munich Putsch)

The division in the left between the communists and the socialists and their failure to work against the danger from the extreme right

The failure of the men in power and influence to understand the intent and danger of the Nazi movement

THE APPEAL OF NAZISM

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 the 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.

Gordon Greenwood, *The Modern World*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1964, p. 516.

QUESTION

- 1 According to the source, who found Nazism most appealing?

The division of the left

The Nazis' victory was made easier by the divisions among the political parties of the left. There was a long-running feud between the German Communist Party (KPD) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The communists (KPD) could never forgive the Social Democrats for ordering the suppression of the Spartacists in 1919 (see pages 31–32). They also attacked the failure of the SPD to carry through any significant social reform. In fact, the SPD had lost its revolutionary goals. It had become a socialist party in name only, reluctant or unable to carry through the changes to the social and economic structure that might have given parliamentary democracy and the republic a better chance of survival.

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 (SPD), whom they called 'social fascists'. The SPD had become demoralised. 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 clashing with 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.

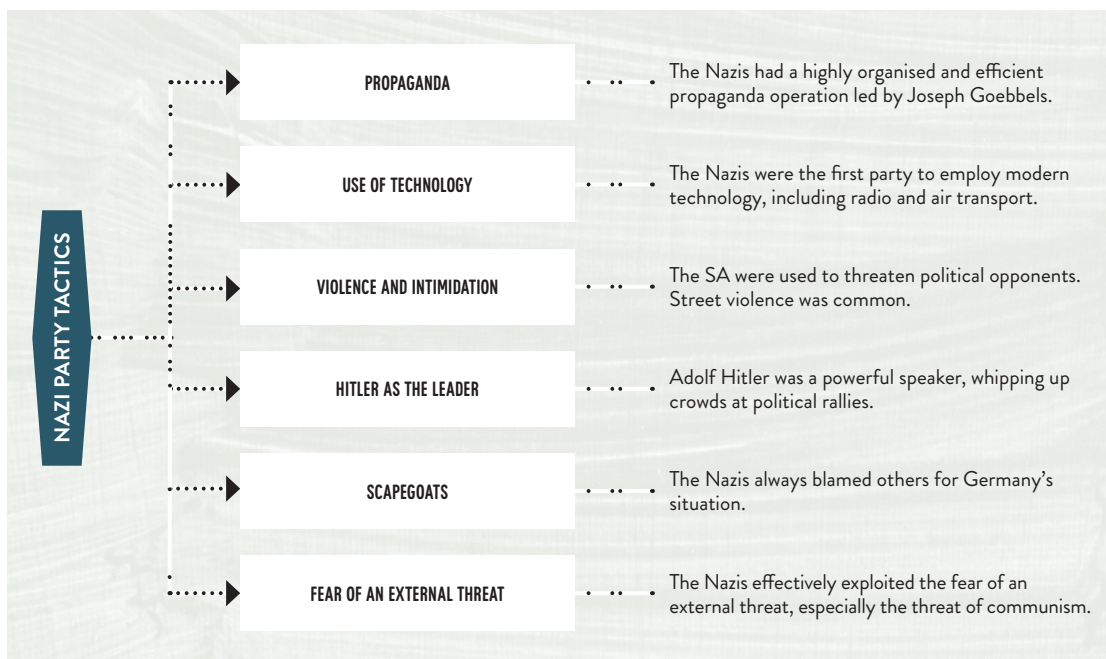
The role of Adolf Hitler

Any explanation of the success of the Nazis must take note of the central role of Adolf Hitler. German historians Eberhard Jäckel and Klaus Hilderbrand, who have been identified with the internationalist school of historical debate, argue that he is such a central figure that Nazism might well be called 'Hitlerism'.²²

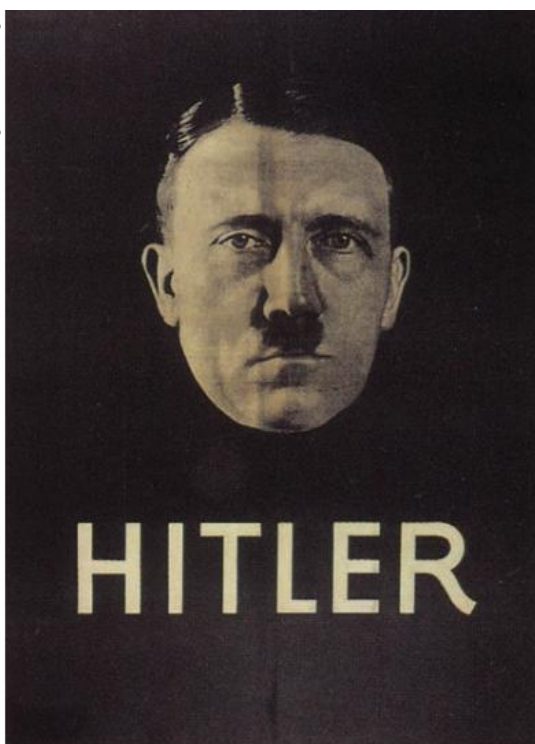
It is difficult to believe that the Nazis would have come to power without Hitler. The force of his personality drove the movement, and he sought power with a ruthless will and determination. He had a passion to dominate and an absolute belief in himself as a man destined to lead the German people. As well as 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.

Nazi tactics

The Nazis developed extremely effective electioneering tactics. More than any other political party, they not only got their message across but also targeted that message to particular groups within German society. They knew how to exploit the hardship and fears of the time, particularly after the Great Depression took hold. In rallies and on radio, in political meetings and street parades, the Nazis became the very visible presence of the party that promised change.



The Nazis were very clever at telling different groups what they wanted to hear, be they farmers or small traders, the professional middle class or the great mass of the working class, who would normally support the SPD. Joseph Goebbels, who later became the Minister for Propaganda and Public Enlightenment, was instrumental in planning the major election campaigns, developing particular themes and using Hitler's staged public appearances to maximum effect. Goebbels understood the power of technology, using loudspeakers to create mass political meetings, carefully designed posters that conveyed a simple but total message, and the aeroplane to move Hitler across the country as no other politician had ever done. 'We will not rest,' said Goebbels, 'until they give us the power.' Every mistake and weakness of the democracy was exploited.



Election poster, 1932

From the Nazi Propaganda Department to all regional departments, 1932

The Hitler poster depicts a fascinating Hitler head on a black background ... in accordance with the Führer's wishes, this poster is to be put up only during the final days of the campaign. Since experience shows that during the final days there is a variety of coloured posters, this poster with its completely black background will contrast with all the others and produce a tremendous effect on the masses.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds),
Documents on Nazism 1919–1945
vol. 1, Liverpool, 1988, p. 73.

HISTORIANS ON THE ROLE OF HITLER

SOURCE A: Richard Overy, 1989

Hitler is still a central figure in our explanation of what happened between 1933 and 1945, but he is not a sufficient explanation. He cannot be understood divorced from the society and political culture which made Nazism possible. The course of German history between the wars was not determined by Hitler alone but was shaped by economic, cultural, and social forces of which Nazism was an integral part. The rise of Hitler was neither inevitable nor irresistible, though they must sometimes have seemed so.

Richard Overy, 'Hitler and the Third Reich', *Modern History Review*, November 1989.

SOURCE B: Michael Burleigh, 2000

Hitler's final ascent to the German chancellorship was due to his own political skills, the sins of commission and omission of his immediate predecessors and President Hindenburg's decision to pursue this fateful option...the Nazis used the melodramatic term 'seizure of power' to describe what was actually a complex process of bargaining and intrigue in which they were not always the main actors...Papen exuded confidence that Hitler could be contained (but he) underestimated Hitler's rat-like cunning.

Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History*, Macmillan, London, 2000, pp. 149–151.



SOURCE C: Ian Kershaw, 1998

Without the unique conditions in which he came to prominence, Hitler would have counted for nothing. It is hard to imagine him bestriding the stage of history at any other time. His style, his brand of rhetoric would, deprived of such conditions, have been without appeal ... he exploited the conditions brilliantly.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 426.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What key historical point is being made by both Richard Overy in Source A and Michael Burleigh in Source B?
- 2 How does Richard Overy in Source A explain the rise of Hitler?
- 3 What are the 'unique conditions' Ian Kershaw is referring to in Source C?

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900), GERMAN PHILOSOPHER, ON THE INFLUENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

In all great deceivers a remarkable process is at work to which they owe their power. In the very act of deception with all its preparations, the dreadful voice, expression and gestures, they are overcome by their belief in themselves; it is this belief which then speaks, so persuasively, so miracle-like to the audience.

Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in Joseph Stern, *Hitler the Führer and the People*, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 35.

SOURCE STUDY

QUESTION

- 1 Nietzsche wrote these words in 1878, 11 years before Hitler was born. What is the point Nietzsche is making, and can it be applied to Hitler?

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 their peak in July 1932 the Nazis received 37.4 per cent of the vote, and in the election that followed in November, their voting strength declined. Although the electoral support made the Nazis the largest party in the Reichstag after 1932, they never held a majority of seats.

In the end the Nazis were given power in January 1933 by the deliberate action of the conservative elite groups who were actually 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, and 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.



Getty Images/Julstein bild Dtl.

Franz von Papen, one of the men who underestimated Hitler and helped to put him into power, taking a back seat to the man he was supposed to have controlled

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 even 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, 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. 'Did not chance weave its threads into the fabric,' he wrote. '... 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.'²³ Meinecke called it chance; Hitler believed it was Providence (the will of God).

THE NAZIS TO POWER

SOURCE A: The historian Joachim Fest on Hitler's opponents

His adversaries [opponents] were the ones to make it possible: they had shorn the parties and the Reichstag of political power; they set up the series of election campaigns; they created the precedent of undermining the constitution. Whenever one of them decided to resist the Nazis another invariably stood up to frustrate him. On the whole the forces on the other side were up to the last greater than Hitler's own. But since they turned against one another, they balanced one another out. It was not hard to see that Nazism was the enemy of all — the middle class, the communists and socialists, the Jews, the republicans. But these groups were all so blind and weak that very few came to the natural conclusion — they must unite against their common foe.

Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 368.

SOURCE B: The journalist William Shirer (an eyewitness to the events)

The Third Reich was inaugurated [begun] in peacetime and peacefully by the Germans themselves ... the Germans imposed the Nazi tyranny on themselves. Many of them, perhaps the majority, did not realise it at that noon hour of January 30, 1933 when President Hindenburg, acting in a perfectly constitutional manner, entrusted the chancellorship to Adolf Hitler. But they were soon to learn.

William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Pan Books, London, 1960, p. 235.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Based on your reading of Source A, where does the historian Joachim Fest lay blame for the Nazis' rise to power?
- 2 Do you agree with the journalist William Shirer that 'the Germans imposed the Nazi tyranny on themselves'? Why?
- 3 Which of these interpretations do you find more convincing? Why?

Who voted for the Nazis?

In 1928 only 810 000 Germans voted for the Nazi Party. Four years later, in a free and democratic election in July 1932, the Nazis gained 13.7 million votes. By any standard this was a remarkable achievement, and historians have been very interested to find out who in German society voted for the Nazis.

In recent times there has been some important historical research on the social foundations of the Nazi movement, and this has provided new insights into which groups voted for the Nazis. Among the leading scholars who have contributed to this debate are Richard Hamilton, in *Who Voted for Hitler?* (1982), and the German historian Jürgen Falter, in *Hitler's Voters* (1990).

The traditional view had always been that the Nazis won their support from mainly conservative middle-class voters. The Nazis were strongest, in fact, in Protestant northern and central Germany, particularly in the small towns and villages. One of the great strengths of the Nazi Party was its ability to get into Germany's provincial cities and villages and capture the support of the middle-class Germans.

It was also believed that, despite their intense efforts, the Nazis did not really attract German working-class support. The German workers, it was assumed, tended to support the parties of the left, the SPD and the KPD.

Recent analysis of voting patterns suggests that this may not have been the case. There is now general agreement among scholars that the Nazi Party did not draw most of its support from the middle class. In fact, it drew its support from a wide range of social groups in German society, including a significant element from the working class. Jürgen Falter has called the Nazi party ‘a people’s party of protest with a middle-class bulge’.²⁴ His analysis of electoral data suggests that in the 1932 elections almost 40 per cent of the Nazi votes came from the working class. The broad appeal of the Nazis by 1932 suggests that the Nazi Party had become Germany’s first *Volkspartai*, a broad-based party that cut across class, occupation and regional differences. While the Nazis found their strongest support in Protestant middle-class Germany and in the small towns and country villages, the evidence now suggests that the party in fact had a much wider basis of appeal, and that almost all Germans found something in the Nazi movement that appealed to them.

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 middle class there was a growing hostility towards 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 10 times the wage of a coal miner. In the 1920s they received 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 each found different things in the Nazi message. Most were attracted by the aggressive line the Nazis took against the left, and particularly against the communists. Many were worried about the social disorder and disintegration, and 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. Nazism became the authentic voice of the small townsperson, the anxious official, the small-business operator, the farmer who heard the Nazi promise of agrarian reform, and the civil servants and professionals who had lost out in status and income to other groups. The Nazi Party was made up of and led by people like this. Nazi leaders articulated their fears and desires and promised to end the crisis.

MIDDLE-CLASS SUPPORT FOR THE NAZIS

SOURCE STUDY

For five years I remained unemployed and was broken in body and spirit and I learned how stupid were all my dreams in those hard days at university. I was not wanted by Germany, and certainly, if I was not wanted here, I was not wanted anywhere in the world ...

Just then I was introduced to Hitler. You won’t understand and I cannot explain either because I don’t know what happened, but life for me took on a tremendous new significance. After all Germany would rise again, after all I was wanted ... I can only tell you that I cannot go back ... Believe me I cannot face uncertainty and conflict again. No for me it is Hitler and the resurrection of Germany ... I have chosen Hitler, leave me in peace with my choice.

Ernestine Buller, *Darkness over Germany*, Longmans Green, 1941, p. 108.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what this particular person found attractive in the Nazi movement.
- 2 Using this source and your own knowledge, explain why many middle class Germans supported the Nazis.

The Nazis and young people

The support the Nazis received from the German middle class is reflected not only in the voting trends but also in the composition of the Nazi Party itself. The overwhelming majority of party members came from the white-collar middle class, and the majority of these were young. In 1930, 60 per cent of the Nazi deputies in the Reichstag were under 40 years of age. The equivalent figure for the SPD was 20 per cent. In January 1933, when the party came to power, 70 per cent of the party members were under 40 years of age. The Nazi movement had a particular appeal to the young. It offered an outlet for their idealism and hope. The Nazis promoted the idea of the 'national community' (*Volksgemeinschaft*), urging Germans to put aside class and social divisions and to put the interests of the national community first. The idea that the Nazis stood above class interests and looked only to the national good appealed to many Germans, particularly the young.

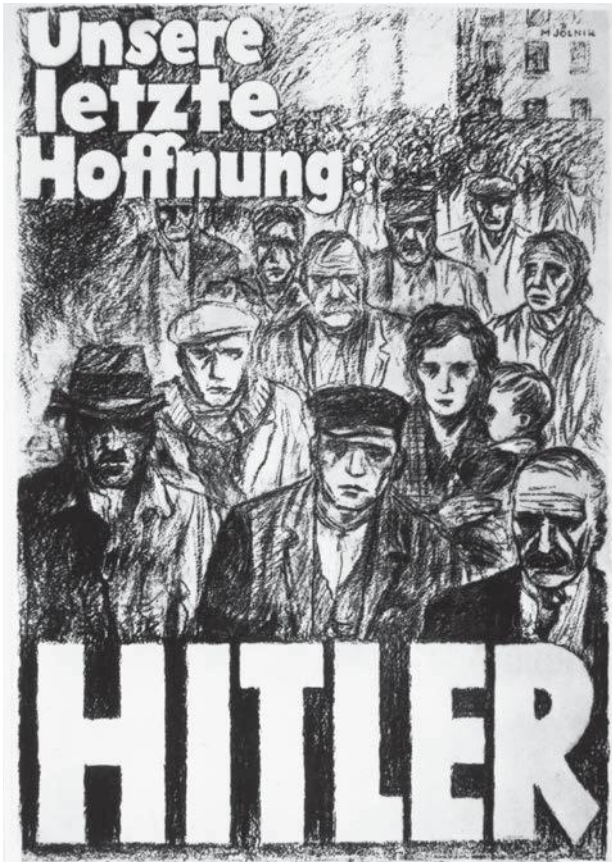


Getty Images/Bettmann

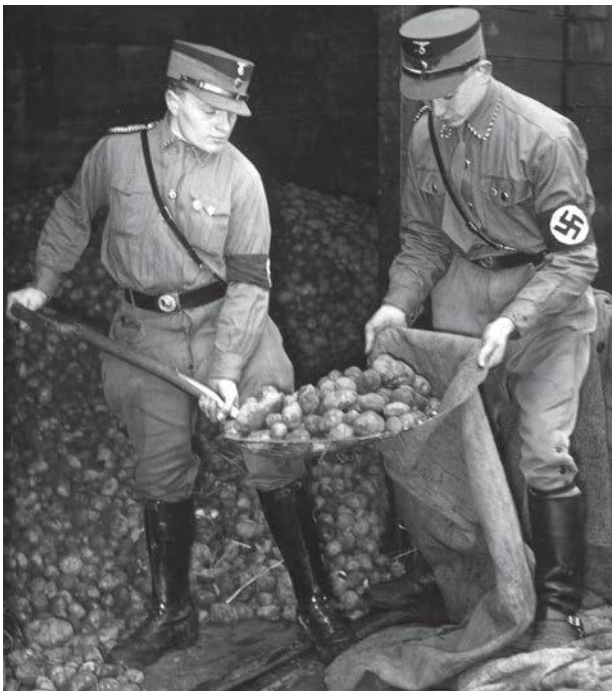
The young were particularly attracted to Nazism, as it offered an outlet for their idealism and hope.

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 working-class loyalty remained with the SPD or the KPD. However, after the onset of the Depression in 1929, the Nazis began to win a significant degree of working-class support, particularly in the urban centres, where many workers moved their support from the middle-class parties or the SPD to the Nazis. In the large industrial regions like the Ruhr and the Rhineland, however, where trade unions were stronger, the Nazis made little headway. Working-class support here still went to the SPD or the KPD.



A 1932 Nazi election poster aimed at German workers: 'Our last Hope: Hitler'



Members of the SA bagging potatoes donated by farmers in rural Germany to assist the needy

The working-class people, like other Germans, were vulnerable to Nazi propaganda. The Nazis promised the workers their 'right to work' and hammered at the failure of the parties of the left to protect the interests of the working class. Once again the Nazis projected themselves as a 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, whose vote dropped from 29.8 per cent in 1928 to 18.3 per cent in 1933.

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 this support soon 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. The steady decline in world commodity prices meant that German agriculture had been depressed from the mid-1920s. The result was an increase in the level of agricultural debt and a decline in living standards for the rural population. 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 the Nazis came to power they implemented policies to preserve the existence of the farming communities and the bond between what they called the *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 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 the west, 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 German were Protestant and 33 per cent were Catholic. Support for the Nazis came mainly from Protestant voters in the north. Catholic voters, mainly in the southern states, were the most resistant to the Nazis, instead supporting the Catholic Centre Party and the Bavarian People's Party.

REICHSTAG ELECTIONS, 1928–1932

Votes for the major political groups by seats and as a percentage of total votes in the Reichstag elections, 1928–1932

	1928	1930	July 1932	November 1932
Left-wing parties				
SPD	153 (29.8%)	143 (24.5%)	133 (21.6%)	121 (20.4%)
KPD	54 (10.6%)	77 (13.1%)	89 (14.6%)	100 (16.9%)
Catholic parties				
Centre	62 (12.1%)	68 (11.8%)	75 (12.5%)	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 (8.8%)
Right-wing parties				
Nazi Party	12 (2.8%)	107 (18.3%)	230 (37.3%)	196 (32%)

QUESTIONS

- 1 Which two political parties maintained a fairly consistent level of political support from 1928 to 1932? Can you explain why?
- 2 Which political parties lost support? Why do you think people stopped supporting these parties?
- 3 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 workers?
- 4 Do these figures suggest that religion had a role to play in determining who voted for the Nazi Party?

Historiography

Hitler's rise to power not only affected the German people, it also changed the course of world history. It led to World War II and to the deaths of millions, including systematic **genocide**. When the Nazi movement was destroyed and the war won, the consequences remained – a divided Europe, a new Cold War and a legacy that lasted into the twenty-first century.

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 should have experienced such a dark episode in its history. Why did Germany, unlike other Western industrial nations, end up with Hitler?

The special path (*Sonderweg*)

In the 1950s much of the study of Nazi Germany was done by non-German historians, who 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 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 or a true expression of liberalism or freedom. German nationalism and militarism were also features of this special path. 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 so many people in Weimar Germany were hostile to the republic. There was also a long authoritarian tradition of Germany having a strong leader. 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 not an accident of history but rather the end result of elements that had long been at work within the nation.

The British historian AJP Taylor suggested, 'It was no more a mistake for the German people to end up with Hitler than it is an accident when a river flows into the sea'.²⁵ Another writer who experienced the Nazi regime firsthand was the American journalist William Shirer. In his popular book *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, written in the 1950s, Shirer saw Nazism as a logical continuation of German history.

Not surprisingly, this view has been challenged by German historians, the first being Gerhard Ritter in his work *The Third Reich*, published in 1955. Ritter suggested that Nazism was but one of a number of **totalitarian** movements that came to power in Europe in the 1930s. Germany was not the only nation that lost its democracy. Ritter suggested that in order to explain the Nazi success, one must dismiss the idea that Nazism grew from Germany's past and instead explain why '... twentieth century Europe gave the totalitarian state such a good opportunity of taking the place of a constitutional parliamentary state. For the totalitarian state, composed of one single party, is a European, and not solely a German phenomenon'.²⁶

The structuralist and intentionalist views of German history

By the 1970s the growing historical debate about this period of German history had developed into two schools, usually called the structuralists and the intentionalists.

The structuralist view of German history places greater importance on historical, social and economic structures within the nation, rather than on the role of the individual in shaping history. Among these scholars were German historians Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, who, while not denying Hitler's importance, believe that there were certain *structures* within German society, such as the army, the bureaucracy, and economic forces, which were sympathetic to the right-wing Nazi movement and play a major role in explaining Hitler's success. Martin Broszat also argues that despite the momentum of the Nazi movement, Hitler's success was never inevitable. It is a view now generally accepted by some serious scholars of the Nazi era. Ian Kershaw, a prominent British scholar of Nazi Germany, also believed that an understanding of the structures within the Nazi state and how it functioned were key to developing a correct understanding of events.

In recent years there has been a great deal of new research done on the Nazi period, much of it by a new generation of German historians. Some of this has focused on the central role of Hitler himself, and the question 'Would the Nazis have come to power without Hitler?' German historian KD Bracher, writing in 1979, saw Hitler as a fanatic, a man obsessed, who rose to power through his unshakeable determination and the weakness and miscalculation of his political opponents. Other German historians such as Eberhard Jäckel and Klaus Hildebrand also believe that to explain the rise of the Third Reich one cannot ignore the importance of Hitler. Those who advance this argument are sometimes called the intentionalists, because they see the importance of the role or *intent* of Hitler and the Nazis.

The structuralist/intentionalist debate has now passed, and the increasingly accepted view is a synthesis of the two schools of thought. Ian Kershaw is one historian who has increasingly moved to this view. Understanding the structure of the Nazi state remains central to any understanding, but no historian could doubt the importance of Hitler and his ideological beliefs, either. This view delivers a far better understanding of why the Nazis came to power and does not accept the idea that it was all inevitable. 'There was,' writes Kershaw 'no inevitability about Hitler's accession to power'.²⁷

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 all 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'.²⁸

The events of 1930–1933 made it likely that Hitler would gain power, and in the end he was given this power by others. Ironically, he gained power at the very moment when the Nazis appeared to have passed their peak and their movement may well have declined in support and votes.

HISTORIANS AND THE NAZI ASCENDENCY

SOURCE A: Friedrich Meinecke: a 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'.

Friedrich 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, 1963, p. 253.

SOURCE C: Ian Kershaw, British historian, 1998

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*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 424.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What key point about Hitler's rise to power do all three historians agree on?
- 2 According to Alan Bullock (Source B) and Ian Kershaw (Source C), which group was most responsible for Hitler's victory in 1933?
- 3 List the key points that Bullock and Kershaw agree on in explaining Hitler's success.
- 4 To whom is Kershaw referring to in Source C when he writes of Hitler's 'friends' in high places?
- 5 Which interpretation do you find more convincing about Hitler's rise to power? Explain your answer using Sources A, B, and C and your own knowledge.

WHO VOTED FOR THE NAZIS?

- ◆ The Nazi Party, rather than being a party that drew its support from one class, in fact drew support from a wide social base in German society.
- ◆ Historians do not dispute the fact that the Nazis won their greatest support from the lower middle class of German society.
- ◆ The work of historian Jürgen Falter suggests that the Nazis won greater support among the German working class than had previously been accepted.
- ◆ Electoral support for the Nazi Party was unstable. One reason the Nazi vote could rise so spectacularly and then decline (as it did in November 1932) was that it was a party of protest, a party that thrived on social disillusionment.
- ◆ A wide cross-section of Germans voted for the Nazi Party in 1930 and 1932 out of frustration with the other political parties and because they were vulnerable to Nazi propaganda. Given a different economic and social situation, they would have voted differently.
- ◆ The Nazis won most of their electoral support in the Protestant northern states of Germany and in the rural areas.
- ◆ People in the Catholic areas of southern Germany remained the least likely to vote for the Nazi Party.
- ◆ The Nazis did not win significant support in the great industrial centres or major cities.
- ◆ In terms of age distribution, the young tended to support the Nazi Party, both in membership and votes.

- 1 Parliamentary government Presidential government
 - i Explain the meaning of these two terms.
 - ii In what year did the transition take place from one to the other?
 - iii Describe how and why this transition took place.
- 2 Account for the growing appeal of the Nazi movement 1929 to 1933.
- 3 How important was Adolf Hitler to the growth of the Nazi movement from 1923 to 1929?
- 4 How do historians' interpretations of the rise of the Nazis differ?
- 5 What is the *Sonderweg*? Why have most historians now rejected the concept?
- 6 Find a primary source that deals with an aspect of the Nazis' rise to power, e.g. a photo of Hitler addressing the crowd, a propaganda poster, a memoir. Evaluate its usefulness to a historian studying the Nazis' rise to power. In groups of 3 or 4 compare and contrast the sources, focussing on the value and limitations of each source.

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTION

- 1 'It was the Nazis' ability to effectively harness the discontent caused by the Great Depression that enabled them to come to power in 1933.' To what extent is this statement accurate?
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Endnotes

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- 3 Margaret MacMillan, *History's People: Personalities and the Past*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2015, p. 120.
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- 5 Eberhard Kolb, *The Weimar Republic*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 119.
- 6 Gordon Craig, *Germany 1866–1945*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1978, p. 534.
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- 8 André Francois-Poncet, *Souvenirs d'une Ambassade à Berlin*, Flammarion, Paris, 1939, p. 52.
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- 11 Quoted in Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 350.
- 12 Franz von Papen, *Memoirs*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1952, p. 217.
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- 24 Jeremy Noakes, *Modern History Review*, Vol. 6, April 1995, p. 31.
- 25 Alan JP Taylor, *The Course of German History*, Methuen, London, 1961, preface.
- 26 Gerhard Ritter, *The Weimar Republic*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1955, p. 23.
- 27 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1896–1936: Hubris*, p. 424.
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Establishing the totalitarian state: Germany 1933–1934

7.1

THE PATH TO
DICTATORSHIP

7.2

CREATING THE TOTALITARIAN
STATE IN GERMANY

7.3

RESTLESS STORMTROOPERS:
THE NIGHT OF THE
LONG KNIVES

7.4

NAZISM AS TOTALITARIANISM



Solemn and sinister. A Nazi Party ceremony in Munich in 1936, an annual event held to commemorate the Munich Beer Hall Putsch

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

charismatic

A quality displayed by particular individuals who influence, attract or command the attention of others. Hitler had a charismatic influence – an aura or appeal that meant many were prepared to follow him.

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.

Führer

The German word for 'leader'. In Nazi Germany, Hitler was called the 'Führer'.

Night of the Long Knives

The name used to refer to the elimination

of the SA leadership on 30 June 1934.

Reichsrat

The body that represented the German states. It was abolished by the Nazis in 1934.

Third Reich

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

TIMELINE

Germany 1933–1934

1933

30 JANUARY

Adolf Hitler was appointed Reich chancellor by President von Hindenburg.

27 FEBRUARY

The Reichstag fire.

28 FEBRUARY

Presidential decree was issued *For the Protection of People and State*.

5 MARCH

Reichstag elections were held. The Nazis won 43.9 per cent of the vote.

13 MARCH

Joseph Goebbels was appointed Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

21 MARCH

The first Reichstag of the Third Reich opened with a special ceremony at Potsdam.

23 MARCH

The *Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and State* (the Enabling Act) was passed in the Reichstag.

7 APRIL

The *Law for the Coordination of the States with the Reich* was issued.

The *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* was issued.

2 MAY

The German trade union movement was abolished. The German Labour Front (DAF) was set up in its place.

1934

14 JULY

The *Law Against the Establishment of Political Parties* was issued. The Nazi Party became the only legal political party in Germany.

12 NOVEMBER

Reichstag elections were held. The Nazi Party won every seat in the German parliament.

30 JANUARY

The *Law for the Reconstruction of the Reich* effectively abolished the German states.

14 FEBRUARY

The Reichsrat was abolished.

20 APRIL

Heinrich Himmler was appointed head of the Gestapo.

24 APRIL

A special People's Court was set up, as part of the judicial system, to deal with crimes against the state.

30 JUNE

The Night of the Long Knives. Ernst Röhm and the leadership of the SA were suppressed.

2 AUGUST

President Paul von Hindenburg died. The position of president was abolished and Hitler combined the offices of president and chancellor. The German army swore a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler himself.

7.1

THE PATH TO DICTATORSHIP

The legal dictator

The idea that Hitler and the Nazis seized power in January 1933 is incorrect. There was no seizure of power; Hitler was given power legally in accordance with the constitution. He came to government as part of a right-wing coalition with only three Nazis in the cabinet. It was 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 both Hitler and the Nazi movement. Having taken the Nazis into government, they proved incapable of controlling the Nazi revolution that now engulfed them and Germany.

Hitler despised democracy and made no secret of his contempt for the democratic parties. When he was appointed chancellor, Hitler swore to uphold the constitution, but he had no intention of honouring this commitment. Hitler's concept of leadership, expressed in *Mein Kampf*, 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 dictatorship 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 in January 1933 he had, in large measure, achieved this aim, moving from the role of legal chancellor to that of legal dictator. The process was amazingly fast – to the point that even the Nazis were astonished at their own success.

In the Nazis' 10-year struggle for power from 1923 to 1933, Hitler had placed special emphasis on the need for legality. Until the Nazis were secure in power, it was important to preserve this appearance. Under the cover of this legality Hitler set about the task of establishing his absolute personal rule. His tactic was to use the constitution to alter the constitution. In a speech in September 1930, Hitler gave a clear indication of his thinking. 'The constitution,' he observed, 'only maps out the arena of battle, not the goal. We enter the legal agencies and in that way will make our party the determining factor. However once we possess the constitutional power we will mould the state into the shape we hold to be suitable.'¹

THE MINISTERS OF THE HITLER GOVERNMENT, JANUARY 1933

SOURCE A



Getty Images/Keystone-France

The Hitler government, 30 January 1933.

Seated L–R: Hermann Goering, Adolf Hitler (chancellor), Franz von Papen (vice-chancellor).
Standing L–R: Franz Seldte, Guenther Gereke, Schwerin von Krosigk, Wilhelm Frick, Werner von Blomberg, Alfred Hugenberg.

SOURCE STUDY

SOURCE B

Reich chancellor	Adolf Hitler (Nazi Party)
Vice-Chancellor	Franz von Papen
Foreign Minister	Konstantin von Neurath*
Minister for the Interior	Wilhelm Frick (Nazi Party)
Minister for Defence	General Werner von Blomberg
Minister for Finance	Count Schwerin von Krosigk*
Minister for Economics	Alfred Hugenberg (Nationalist Party)
Minister for Labour	Franz Seldte
Minister for Posts	Paul von Eltz-Rübenach*
Minister for Justice	Franz Gürtner*
Reich Commissioner for Employment	Günther Gereke*
Minister without Portfolio and Prussian Minister for the Interior	Hermann Göring (Nazi Party)

*Conservative civil servants and members of the previous government

SOURCE C

What do you want? I have Hindenburg's confidence. Within two months we shall have pushed Hitler so far into the corner that he'll squeak.

Vice-Chancellor Franz von Papen, quoted in Karl Dietrich Bracher,
The German Dictatorship, Praeger, New York, 1970, p. 195.

QUESTION

- 1 What gave von Papen reason to believe that he would be the real power in the new German government, and that Hitler could be controlled?

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. The new chancellor wanted to build up an element of mass support in the country in order to strengthen his position against both his political opponents and the president. Using propaganda and the resources of the state, the new government was projected as a government of national revival. 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. In his first speech as chancellor, Hitler focused on this theme.

The use of force

Despite Hitler's appeal to national revival and the tactic of working within the legal framework of the state, the reality was that the Nazis used force and intimidation from the start. 'The first condition of power,' Hitler wrote, 'lies in the constant and uniform application of force.'² In earlier election campaigns the Sturmabteilung (SA) had played their part in street violence, particularly against their communist opponents. In this election campaign, they were given a free hand. The main targets for Nazi violence were again the communists and the socialists, but it was also a time

for settling old scores. Arrests began, and the SA opened the first **concentration camps** for political opponents at Dachau, outside Munich and at Oranienburg, outside Berlin. Former chancellors Joseph Wirth and Heinrich Brüning fled the country. Schleicher, who stayed in Germany, was shot by the Nazis in 1934.

This use of force was made easier because, although there were only three Nazis in the government, two of them controlled the police. Wilhelm Frick, as Minister for the Interior, controlled the national police and Hermann Göring, who was appointed Prussian Minister for the Interior, 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 SS. 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.'³ Another organisation that rapidly began to expand from early 1933 was Geheime Staatspolizei, the secret state police or Gestapo.

With the influx of political prisoners, the first concentration camps were established, operated at this time by the SA. One of the first was at Oranienburg near Berlin, which held mainly Communist Party members and socialists who were outspoken against the new Hitler government. It was a makeshift detention centre established in a disused brewery. A larger, more permanent camp was established at Dachau near Munich in March 1933.

FROM HITLER'S APPEAL TO THE GERMAN PEOPLE, 31 JANUARY 1933

The National Government will therefore regard it as its first and supreme task to restore to the German people unity of mind and will. It will preserve and defend the foundations on which the strength of our nation rests ... We feel responsible to German history for the reconstitution of a proper national body so that we may finally overcome the insanity of class and class warfare. We do not recognise classes but only the German people, its millions of farmers, citizens and workers who together will either overcome this time of distress or succumb [give in] to it ... The Government of the National Revival wishes to set to work and it will work ... Let us begin, loyal to the command of the Field Marshal. May Almighty God favour our work, shape our will in the right way, bless our vision and bless us with the trust of the German people.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 165.



Hitler's appeal to the German people

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why Hitler called the new government the 'Government of the National Revival'.
- 2 In this, his first speech as German chancellor, what image is Hitler trying to convey to the German people about the new government?
- 3 Put yourself in the position of a newspaper journalist in 1933. Prepare an article for your newspaper in which you:
 - i explain how the new government came to power in January 1933
 - ii suggest what you expect this new government will do now incorporate source material such as short extracts from Hitler's speech into the article.



Intimidation in the streets. An officer of the Prussian police force and a member of the SA patrol a Berlin street, March 1933.

IMPOSING RULE

SOURCE A



SA men guard the concentration camp set up at Oranienburg near Berlin in March 1933.

SOURCE B: Hermann Göring's instructions to the Prussian police, 17 February 1933

I assume that it is unnecessary to point out that the police must in all circumstances avoid giving even the appearance of a hostile attitude still less the impression of persecuting the patriotic associations (SA, SS, Stahlhelm). I expect all police authorities to maintain the best relations with these organizations which comprise the most important constructive forces of the state ... The activities of subversive organizations are, on the contrary, to be combated with the most drastic methods. Communist terrorist acts and attacks are to be proceeded against with all severity, and weapons may be used ruthlessly when necessary. Police officers who in the execution of this duty use their firearms will be supported by me regardless of the effects of their shots.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 169.

SOURCE C: An eyewitness: Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*

Walking along the pavement ahead of me were three SA men. They all carried Nazi banners on their shoulders, [and] the banner staves had sharp metal points shaped into arrowheads.

All at once the three SA men came face to face with a youth of seventeen or eighteen hurrying along in the opposite direction ... I heard one of the Nazis shout 'That's him' and immediately all three flung themselves upon the young man. In a moment they had jostled him into the shadow of a house entrance and were standing over him kicking and stabbing him with the sharp metal points of their banners ...

Another passer-by and myself were the first to reach the doorway where the young man was lying. I got a sickening glimpse of his face—his left eye was poked half out and blood poured from the wound ... Twenty yards away stood a group of heavily armed police ... they magnificently disregarded the whole affair.

Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin*, Penguin Books, London, 1969, p. 80.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Based on the evidence in Sources A, B and C, explain how the Nazis began to deal with political opposition and other voices of protest once they came to power.
- 2 Which groups did Göring identify as 'constructive' and which were 'subversive'?
- 3 Explain why Hermann Göring singled out the communists for special attention in his instructions to the Prussian police in Source B.
- 4 What parts of Göring's remarks would have encouraged the Prussian police to be particularly severe to the communists?
- 5 Explain the main point Christopher Isherwood is making in this extract from his book *Goodbye to Berlin* in Source C.

The Reichstag fire and its consequences

The campaign of intimidation against the communists and others on the left of politics was already underway when, on the night of 27 February 1933, one week before the election, the Reichstag building in Berlin burnt down. There has been much historical debate about whether the Nazis themselves burnt down the Reichstag, but the evidence 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 presented them with a major opportunity and Hitler, ever the opportunist, made the most of it. There were two major consequences of the Reichstag fire. Firstly, it unleashed a massive attack on the German communists as the Nazis played on the theme of a communist





The Reichstag building after the fire on the night of 27 February 1933, which gutted the interior of the German parliament

conspiracy against the state. Communist publications were banned, and in the days that followed almost 4000 arrests took place, including arrests of 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 other, 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.

As the basic freedoms that had been enshrined in the Weimar Constitution were suspended, the basis of the totalitarian state was established. The decree was legal, for it was issued according to the constitution. The use of Article 48 had been a constant feature of German political life since the breakdown of parliamentary government during the time of Chancellor Brüning. The regular use of Article 48 had set a precedent for this final use.

FOR THE PROTECTION OF PEOPLE AND STATE

SOURCE STUDY

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.

- 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 28th February 1933

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

Extracts from the Weimar Constitution of 1919

Article 114 Personal liberty is inviolable [cannot be violated].

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

Article 117 The secrecy of letters and all postal, telegraph and telephone communication is inviolable.

→

Article 118 Every German has the right ... to express his opinion freely ... censorship is forbidden.

Article 123 All Germans have the right to assemble peacefully.

Article 124 All Germans have the right to form associations.

Article 153 The right of private property is guaranteed.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you believe that the presidential decree *For the Protection of People and State* of 28 February 1933 was legal? Justify your answer.
- 2 Describe some of the possible actions that the government could now take against individual Germans as a result of this decree.
- 3 Using Hindenburg's presidential decree and your own knowledge, explain how the Nazis were creating a culture of fear and intimidation from early 1933.

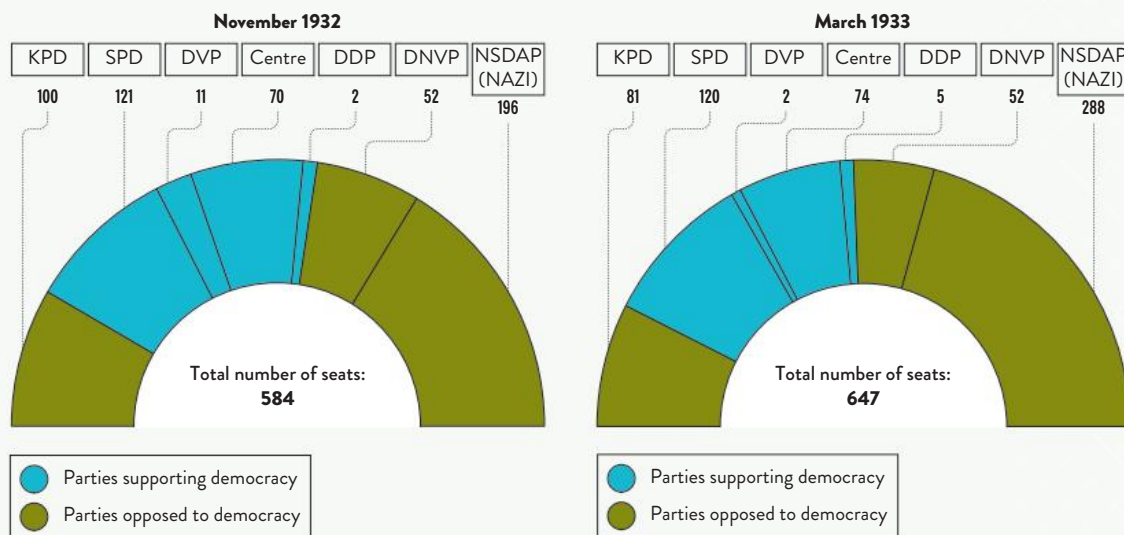
Hitler's conservative allies and many middle-class Germans did not object, believing that there was a real threat from the left. What they failed to note or chose to ignore was that there was nothing to stop the Nazis using these powers against other people as well as the communists, which is exactly 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. From 1933 a permanent state of emergency existed that gave the regime the 'legal' authority to carry out acts of terror and persecution against the German people.

The March 1933 election

In the election of 5 March 1933 the Nazis increased their representation in the Reichstag from 196 to 288 seats. Their coalition ally, the German National People's Party (DNVP), won 52 seats. Of the 647 seats in the Reichstag, the government held 340, which was a working majority.

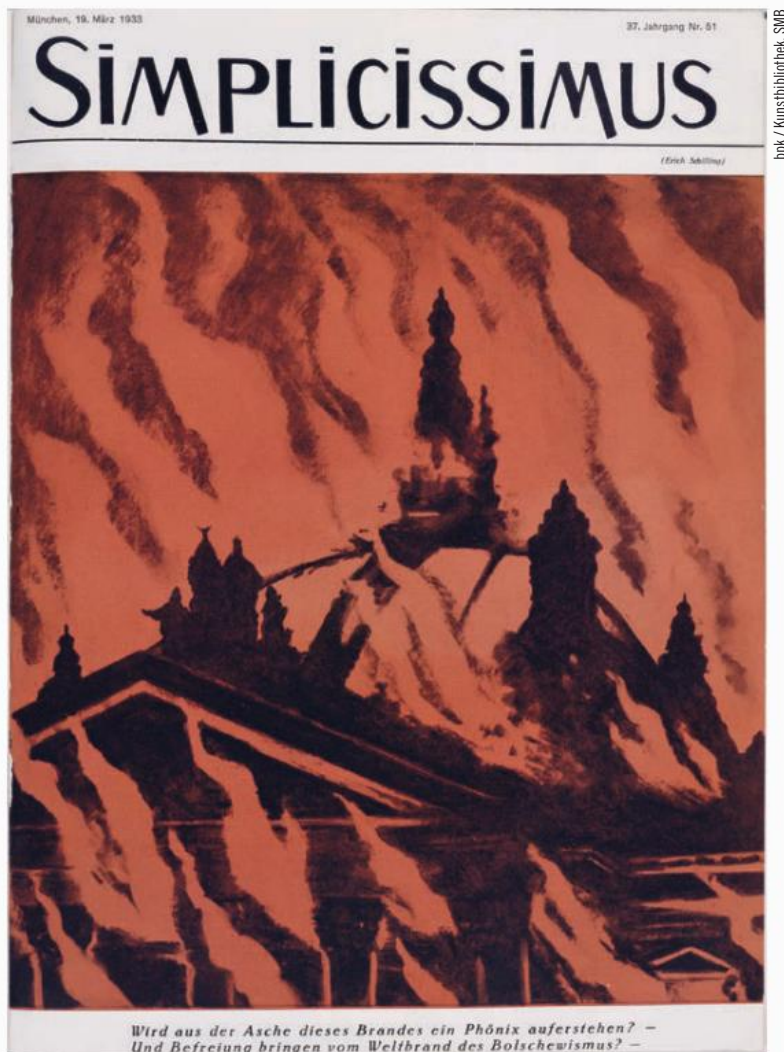
1933 REICHSTAG ELECTIONS

SOURCE A



Comparison of the Reichstag elections of November 1932 and March 1933 (by seats)

SOURCE B



Simplicissimus, the German satirical magazine, 19 March 1933. The caption on the front page reads: 'Will a phoenix rise from the ashes of this fire? And bring liberation from Bolshevism?'

QUESTIONS

- 1 Which 'fire' do you think the magazine is referring to?
- 2 Although blamed for the Reichstag fire, why was the German Communist Party allowed to run candidates for the March 1933 election?
- 3 Outline some of the reasons why the Communists won fewer seats in March 1933 than in November 1932.

The Day of Potsdam, 21 March 1933

In their desire to present the Nazis as the legitimate government and heir to previous periods in German history, an elaborate ceremony to open the first Reichstag of the **Third Reich** was staged in March 1933. The details of the ceremony were worked out by the newly-appointed Minister for Propaganda, Dr Goebbels, and the decision was made to hold the ceremony in nearby Potsdam rather than Berlin. Potsdam was the city of Frederick the Great (1712–1786), so holding the ceremony there sent the message that the Nazis were the heirs to this earlier period of German greatness. The date, 21 March, was also significant – it was the day in 1862 when chancellor Otto von Bismarck had assembled the first Reichstag of the Second Reich. Now, as heir to this authority, Hitler was assembling the first Reichstag of the Third Reich.

The main ceremony, attended by Hitler, President von Hindenburg and the leadership of the German army, was held in the historic Garrison Church where Frederick the Great was buried. Hitler greeted the old Field Marshal with a low bow and a handshake, symbolising the link between the old Germany and the new. Hindenburg spoke of a new beginning that would ‘liberate us from selfishness and party strife and bring us together to bless a proud and free Germany united within herself.’⁴

The Day of Potsdam was broadcast throughout the land. It had great symbolic meaning, showing the alliance between the new and the old. The Third Reich had legally and legitimately assumed the authority of old Imperial Germany, the Germany of the Kaisers. It was cleverly orchestrated to convey the idea that the Nazis respected the traditional values of German society, including the rule of law and the position of the revered president.

Two days later, the new Reichstag reassembled at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin. Hitler introduced an Enabling Act, which, if passed, would end the authority of the elected German parliament. Just like the burnt-out Reichstag building across the square, German democracy was no longer needed.



The Day of Potsdam

THE DAY OF POTSDAM

SOURCE A: Shirer on The Day of Potsdam

Hitler wished at this stage to make a grand gesture to the aged Field Marshal and to the army and to the conservatives, and in doing so to link his rowdy revolutionary regime with Hindenburg’s venerable name and with all the past military glories of Prussia. Hitler would open the new Reichstag, which he was about to destroy, in the Garrison Church at Potsdam which aroused in many Germans memories of imperial glories and grandeur ... Hindenburg was visibly moved and at one point the old Field Marshal had tears in his eyes. Hitler with a show of deep humility towards the President bowed low and gripped his hand. There in the flashing lights of camera bulbs and amid the clicking of film cameras, which Goebbels had placed along with microphones at strategic spots, was recorded for the nation and the world to see, the solemn handclasp of the German Field Marshal and the Austrian corporal, uniting the new Germany with the old.

William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Pan Books, London, 1964. p. 246.

SOURCE B



imagefolk/World History Archive/Ann Roman

'The solemn handclasp of the German Field Marshal and the Austrian corporal, uniting the new Germany with the old.'
(William Shirer)

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the purpose of this great ceremony at Potsdam in March 1933?
- 2 Explain why it was important for Dr Goebbels to record the event.
- 3 What does Source B suggest about Hitler's appointment as Chancellor? How does it reinforce the purpose of the Day of Potsdam? Georgia, is this meant to be a separate question?
- 4 Explain why Hitler is wearing a suit in Source B (when he would have been surrounded by military uniforms).

The Enabling Act, 23 March 1933

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 had suspended the clauses guaranteeing the basic freedoms of the German people. On 23 March, when the new Reichstag met, Hitler proposed the Enabling Act. Its correct title was *A Law for the Removal of the*

Distress of People and 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. Because the Enabling Act represented a change to the constitution, the measure had to be passed by a two-thirds vote of the Reichstag. Once again, the appearance of legality was preserved.

Voting for dictatorship

The 81 communist members elected a few weeks earlier were not in attendance when the new parliament met at the Kroll Opera House in Berlin. After the election the KPD was suppressed, and its elected representatives had been arrested or fled. 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 (two-thirds of the Reichstag). The Socialists (SPD) defied the Nazis, and in a courageous speech their leader, Otto Wels, condemned the proposal. The SPD 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 were persuaded by Hitler's assurances that the basic institutions of government were not threatened, and that the measure was both necessary and temporary. 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. In conceding to Hitler, many still believed that they could influence the future application of the Enabling Act.

THE ENABLING ACT

SOURCE A: Extracts from Hitler's speech to introduce the Enabling Act to the Reichstag, 23 March 1933

The Government does not intend by means of this Enabling Law to do away with the German states ... the Government, being resolved to undertake the political and moral purification of our public life, is creating and securing the conditions necessary for a really profound revival of religious life ... The National Government regards the two Christian Confessions (Protestantism and Roman Catholicism) as the weightiest factors for the maintenance of our nationality ... Their rights are not to be infringed ... The National Government will provide and ensure to the Christian Confessions that influence which is their due in school and in education ... The Government will only make use of these powers in so far as they are essential for carrying out vitally necessary measures. Neither the existence of the Reichstag nor that of the Reichsrat is menaced. The position and rights of the President remain unaffected. It will always be the foremost task of the Government to act in harmony with his aims ... The Government offers to the parties of the Reichstag an opportunity for friendly cooperation. But it is equally prepared to go ahead in the face of their refusal and of the hostility which will result from that refusal. It is for you, gentlemen of the Reichstag, to decide between war and peace.

Norman H Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, Oxford University Press, London, 1942, p. 420.

SOURCE B: The Enabling Act

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.

SOURCE C: The leader of the SPD, Otto Wels, 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. We hail our friends in the Reich. Their steadfastness and faithfulness deserve admiration. Their courage of conviction, their unbroken confidence guarantee a brighter future.

Johannes Hohlfeld and Klaus Hohlfeld (eds), *Dokumente der Deutschen Politik und Geschichte*, vol. 4, Berlin, 1952, pp. 38–40.

Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo



Otto Wels, the leader of the SPD in 1933, was the only man to speak out against Hitler and the Enabling Act in the Reichstag on 23 March 1933. A street was named in honour of Otto Wels in the city of Hamburg.

SOURCE D: From the memoirs of Wilhelm Hoegner, a member of the SPD in 1933

Otto Wels read out our reply to the government declaration ... with his voice half choking he gave our good wishes to the persecuted and oppressed in the country who though innocent were already filling the prisons and concentration camps simply on account of their political creed.

This speech made a terrifying impression on all of us. Only a few hours before we had heard that a member of the SA had taken away the 45 years old welfare worker Maria Janovska of Kopenick to a National Socialist barracks, stripped her completely, bound her to a table and flogged her body with leather whips. The female members of our group were in tears, some sobbed uncontrollably.

But Hitler jumped up furiously and launched into a passionate reply. 'You are no longer needed. I do not even want you to vote for the Enabling Act. Germany shall become free but not through you. Do not mistake us for bourgeois [middle class]. The star of Germany is in the ascendant, yours is about to disappear. Your death knell has sounded' ...

We tried to dam the flood of Hitler's unjust accusations with interruptions of 'No!', 'An error!', 'False!'. But that did us no good. The SA and SS people who surrounded us in a semicircle along the walls of the hall hissed loudly and murmured 'Shut up!', 'Traitors!', 'You'll be strung up today!'

Wilhelm Hoegner, *Der Schwierige Aussenseiter*, Isar-Verlag, Munich, 1963, pp. 92–93.

QUESTIONS

- 1 In his speech to the Reichstag introducing the Enabling Act (Source A), what promises did Hitler make about the intended use of the act?
- 2 Why might some members of the Centre Party have been reassured by Hitler's speech?
- 3 President von Hindenburg signed the Enabling Act into law. Why do you think he did so?
- 4 Identify the main point Otto Wels was making in his speech (Source C). Explain what he meant by 'Where the opportunity exists, there exists also the duty'.
- 5 How useful are Sources A, C and D for an enquiry into the way the Nazis established their dictatorship? Explain your answer, using Sources A, C and D and your knowledge of the historical context.

With the passage of the Enabling Act in March 1933 Hitler achieved dictatorial powers. It had been done under the cover of legality and by using 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, whose signature was no longer required in order to issue decrees. A law became law simply by the government announcing it.

HOW HITLER BECAME DICTATOR, 1933–1934

LEGAL CHANCELLOR

30 JANUARY 1933

- Hitler was appointed chancellor by President von Hindenburg.
- He came to government in a coalition of Nazis and Nationalists.
- There were only three Nazis in the cabinet.
- Vice-Chancellor von Papen and his conservative supporters believed that they would have Hitler and the Nazis under control.
- New elections were called for 5 March 1933.

27 FEBRUARY 1933: THE REICHSTAG FIRE

- The Nazis accused the communists of setting fire to the Reichstag and threatening to overthrow the state.

28 FEBRUARY 1933: DECREE OF THE REICH PRESIDENT

For the Protection of People and State

- Issued by President von Hindenburg under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution.
- The civil liberties and freedoms of the German people, written into the constitution, were 'suspended'.
- This emergency decree remained in force until 1945.

5 MARCH 1933: ELECTIONS

- The Nazis won 288 seats in the Reichstag after an election campaign marked by violence.

21 MARCH 1933: SYMBOLISM

- The Day of Potsdam

22 MARCH 1933: PRESSURE

- The first concentration camp for political opponents was set up at Dachau near Munich.

24 MARCH 1933: THE ENABLING ACT

- A bill was proposed to alter the constitution and give the government the authority to pass laws without the need to refer to the Reichstag or the President.
- Since this was a change to the constitution, a two-thirds vote was required in the Reichstag.
- Most communist members of the Reichstag were arrested.
- The SPD bravely opposed the Enabling Act.
- The Centre Party voted with the Nazis and the Nationalists and the Enabling Act was passed 441 to 94.

LEGAL DICTATOR

- Hitler was now independent of the Reichstag and the President.
- A law became law when the government announced it.
- Hitler did not abolish the constitution; he simply altered it.
- The Nazis took care to preserve the appearance of legality.

placeholder photo acknowledgement

From legal chancellor to legal dictator

PASSING THE ENABLING ACT

- ◆ Although he had been appointed Chancellor legally and according to the constitution, Hitler had no intention of working within the democratic framework of the Weimar Constitution.
- ◆ Hitler's intent was to establish his own power base, independent of both the Reichstag and the President.
- ◆ New elections were called for March 1933.
- ◆ The Reichstag Fire of 27 February 1933 was exploited by the Nazis and allowed them to attack their political opponents, especially the German communists.
- ◆ As a result of the fire, the President issued the Decree for the Protection of People and State, which eliminated the civil liberty clauses of the Weimar Constitution.
- ◆ Street violence and intimidation by the SA and the Prussian police, who were made an auxiliary of the SA, was a feature of the 1933 election.
- ◆ When the Reichstag met after the election of March 1933, Hitler demanded that it pass an Enabling Act – a change to the constitution that would allow the government to act independently of both the President and the Reichstag.
- ◆ Despite opposition from the SPD, the Enabling Act was passed on 23 March 1933, when support from the Centre Party gave Hitler the necessary two-thirds of the vote.

- 1 Place the following events of 1933 in the correct chronological order.
 - A the Reichstag Fire
 - B the Decree for the Protection of People and State
 - C the Day of Potsdam
 - D the Reichstag election of 1933
 - E the passing of the Enabling Act
- 2 Explain the significance of the Reichstag Fire of 27 February 1933.
- 3 Did the following parties support or oppose the Enabling Act? Why did they support or oppose it?

KPD

SPD

Centre

DNVP
- 4 Which groups were the Nazis targeting in early 1933?
- 5 Compare and contrast the purpose, nature and impact of *Decree for the Protection of People and State* (Reichstag Fire Decree) and the *Law for the Removal of the Distress of People and State* (Enabling Act).
- 6 Class discussion: Did democracy still exist in Germany at the end of March 1933?

7.2

CREATING THE TOTALITARIAN STATE IN GERMANY



Totalitarianism

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. Key to understanding the term is the word 'total'. Totalitarianism means there is total control over all aspects of life. There is no provision for debate or criticism. British historian Michael Burleigh has argued that the word totalitarianism is 'the best way of describing Nazism's horrid aspiration to determine both social being and ultimate meanings through ideology, propaganda and terror ... while the "ism" part of the word is unappealing, the "total" part captures most strikingly the insatiable, invasive character of this form of politics which regards individual freedom, autonomous civil society and the rule of law with uncomprehending hate'.⁵

The passing of the Enabling Act was the first step on the path to totalitarian Germany. It allowed the government to quickly 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 them the power to eliminate their political opponents.

Gleichschaltung



Gleichschaltung

This process of bringing the different aspects of the German nation under the control of the Nazi Party is usually referred to as the period of *Gleichschaltung*, a word the Nazis themselves used, which means the process of coordination. It was not enough for the Nazis to come to power; now Germany itself was to be transformed, Nazified, so that the Nazi philosophy of national socialism and the control of the party pervaded every aspect of German life. The Weimar Republic had made the mistake of leaving key areas of the state under the control of people who opposed the republic. This did not happen in Nazi Germany.

After 1933, 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.

The civil service



Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service

When the Nazis came to power, about 1.6 million Germans worked for the civil service. For the Nazi state to function, it was essential that this important group was firmly under the control of, and supported the philosophy of, the party.

In April 1933 the *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service* was proclaimed. Under this law, civil servants of Jewish descent were removed. Jews who had served in World War I were exempt, although in 1938 they too were removed from government service. Also removed were any civil servants who lacked adequate qualifications, and any officials who 'because of their previous political activity do not offer security that they will act at all times and without reservation in the interests of the national state'.⁶

Hitler had very little trouble from the civil service, which was essentially a conservative body and one that had never accepted the republic or the parliamentary system. The civil service had a tradition of conformity and respect for the concept of law. The Nazi emphasis on legality in the early years was not lost on civil servants, who came to rationalise most Nazi action and offered little resistance.

Controlling the trade unions

Although there was some working-class support for the Nazis, most of the German working class, particularly in the great industrial cities, had traditionally supported the SPD and the KPD – the political parties of the left. By 1933 the membership of the German trade union movement stood at almost 6 million, organised into two major groups: the Free Trade Unions and the Catholic Christian Trade Unions.

An essential aim of the Nazi Party was to win the support of the German working class and to control the organisation of labour. On 1 May 1933 Hitler granted workers the May Day holiday, and in a great torchlight rally of workers at Tempelhof airfield that evening, he called for an end to class conflict. The following day he abolished the Free Trade Unions. Using the SA and the police, trade union offices were raided, the leaders were arrested and the organisations were declared illegal. In their place a new organisation known as the German Labour Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, DAF) came into being, led by a high-ranking Nazi official, Dr Robert Ley. The trade unions associated with the Catholic Church survived for a few more weeks, then they too were forced into the new Labour Front.



A 1933 poster for the German Labour Front, the trade union organisation of the Nazi Party, which replaced the many independent trade unions that had existed under the Weimar Republic



PROCLAMATION FROM DR ROBERT LEY, HEAD OF THE ACTION COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF GERMAN LABOUR, 2 MAY 1933

German workers and employees!

The bells have rung in honour of work ... Today we are opening the second chapter of the National Socialist revolution. You may say, you have absolute power, what more do you want? True, we have power, but we do not yet have the whole nation, we do not have you workers 100 per cent and it is you whom we want. We will not let you alone until you give us your entire and genuine support. You shall be freed from the last Marxist [communist] manacles ... For we know that without the German worker there is no German nation. And above all we must prevent your enemy, Marxism, and its satellites from stabbing you again in the back ... Workers I swear to you we shall not only preserve everything which exists, we shall build up even further the protection of the worker's rights so he can enter a new National Socialist State ... in this way we shall build a new Reich of well being, honour and freedom. Forward with Hitler for Germany!

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 424.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain what Robert Ley means by the term 'Marxist manacles'.
- 2 What is Ley seeking to achieve in this proclamation to the German workers?
- 3 What does he mean by the statement 'we do not have you workers 100 per cent ... we will not let you alone until you give us your entire and genuine support'? Where had working-class loyalty traditionally been directed?
- 4 Why do the Nazis want the workers' support? Give an example of the workers in the early Weimar period wielding significant power.

The end of political parties

After the passage of the Enabling Act there was no longer any role for political parties in Germany. The German Communist Party (KPD) had already been declared illegal, and in June the Nazis finally moved against the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the only other party of the left. On 22 June the SPD was banned, its property confiscated, and its seats in the Reichstag declared invalid. The dissolution of the middle-class parties quickly followed.

What was left of the German Democratic Party (DDP) dissolved itself on 28 June. One day later, Hugenburg, the leader of the German National People's Party (DNVP), was dismissed from cabinet, and since Hitler no longer had any need for coalition allies, the party was disbanded. In early July the German People's Party (DVP), Stresemann's party, was abolished, and a few days after that the Centre Party, which had been so important in getting the Enabling Act passed four months earlier, gave in and abolished itself.

THE END OF OPPOSITION PARTIES

Source A: *Law Against the Establishment of Political Parties*, 14 July 1933

The Reich Government has resolved upon the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Article 1: 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, unless a heavier penalty is prescribed under some other regulation, with penal servitude of up to three years, or with imprisonment of from six months to three years.

Reichsgesetzblatt, 1933, Part I, p. 479.

Source B: 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 'that all the things being abolished no longer concerned people very much' ... The feeling of a great change which had affected people vaguely when Hitler entered government now overcame wider and wider sections of the population ... The past was dead. The future, it seemed, belonged to the regime.

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

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why, in the introduction to the *Law Against the Establishment of Political Parties* on 14 July 1933 (Source A), the law is passed not by the Reichstag, but by the Reich government.
- 2 Identify what aspect of the democratic process is violated by the *Law Against the Establishment of Political Parties*.
- 3 Explain the main point the historian Joachim Fest is making in Source B.

The Reichstag election, November 1933

In November 1933 Hitler called for new elections for the Reichstag. Since the Nazi Party was the only political party, it was hardly an election, but the vote was used as proof of the popular appeal of the new regime. All 661 seats in the Reichstag were now held by the Nazi Party – the once-powerful German Reichstag was left without power or influence. It was allowed to survive, and some laws were still issued in its name, but it became little more than a venue for Hitler's political pronouncements. In the words of one observer, it became 'the most highly paid male chorus in the world'.⁷

Controlling the states

Another area that received immediate attention in the *Gleichschaltung* process was the role of the German states. In the centralised system that the Nazis intended to implement, the German states had to be brought under control so they could not oppose the authority of the government in Berlin, as some states had in the days of Weimar. In the *Law for the Coordination of the States with the Reich*, issued in April 1933, a Reich Governor was to ensure that the state government implemented the policies of the government in Berlin. In January 1934 Hitler went a step further and abolished the state parliaments. Since the state parliaments no longer existed, there was no need to preserve the **Reichsrat**, the upper house of the German parliament that represented the German states. In a law passed in February that contained just 18 words, it was abolished.

CONSOLIDATING POLITICAL POWER

Law for the Reconstruction of the Reich, 30 January 1934

The Reichstag has unanimously resolved upon the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Article 1 The State Assemblies are abolished.

Article 2 The sovereign rights of the States are transferred to the Reich.

Law on the Abolition of the Reichsrat, 14 February 1934

The Reich Government has resolved upon the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Article 1 The Reichsrat is abolished.

Reichsgesetzblatt, 1934, Part I.

SOURCE STUDY

QUESTIONS

- 1 What promises had Hitler made about the German states in his speech introducing the Enabling Act in March 1933 (see page 191)?
- 2 Why was it important for the Nazis to eliminate the effective power of the German states?
- 3 Explain why the Reichstag had '*unanimously resolved*' to pass the law of 30 January 1934.

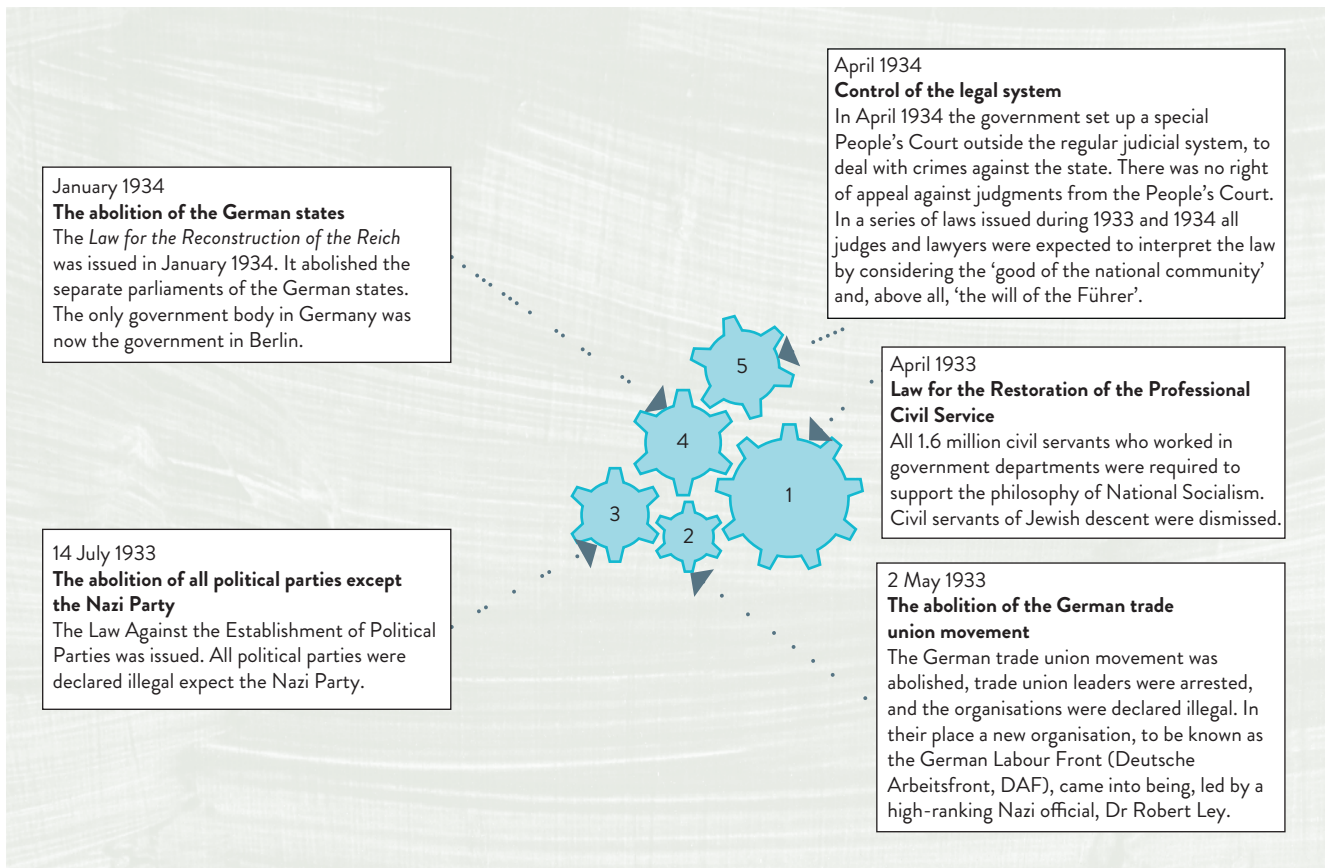
The legal system

One of the features of a true democracy is an independent legal or judicial system that operates with no political interference. In Nazi Germany, however, the opposite developed. As part of the process of *Gleichschaltung* the German legal system was brought under the control of the state.

The German legal system had always expressed a sympathy for right-wing political movements against the republic. This was the same system that had treated Hitler so leniently after the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, allowing him to resume political activity when they could have deported him back to his native Austria. There had also been close links between the legal system and the functioning of government, and a significant number of civil servants had a background in law.

Unlike the abrupt takeover of the trade union movement, the takeover of the legal system was a much slower process, in order to preserve the appearance of legality and continuity.

In 1933 all professional bodies associated with the legal system were abolished and a new body, the National Socialist League for the Maintenance of the Law, was set up. Legal appointments and legal publications were controlled by the state, and judges and lawyers were expected to interpret the law in a broad way, considering the 'good of the national community' and, above all, 'the will of the **Führer**'. Changes in the Civil Service Act allowed for the dismissal of judges who did not act 'in the interest of the National Socialist state'.⁸ 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.



GLEICHSCHALTUNG

- ◆ An Emergency Decree, issued under Article 48 of the constitution, removed the basic freedoms of the German people.
- ◆ Terror and repression now began. Concentration camps were opened to detain political opponents, and Germany became a police state, suppressing all opposition to the Nazi movement.
- ◆ In the months that followed, the Nazis began the process of *Gleichschaltung*, which included:
 - ◆ a *Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service*, which allowed the Nazi Party to control the civil service
 - ◆ a *Law for the Reconstruction of the Reich*, which abolished the state assemblies and effectively completed the Nazi Party control over the German states
 - ◆ a *Law for the Coordination of the States with the Reich*, which resulted in the abolition of the Reichsrat
 - ◆ the abolition of German Trade Unions and the establishment of the German Labour Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront, DAF)
 - ◆ the abolition of all political parties in Germany except the Nazi Party
 - ◆ the creation of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.
- ◆ Reichstag elections were held in November 1933.

- 1 Create a timeline of the process of *Gleichschaltung*. For each entry, identify the targeted group/s and how the group/s were brought under control.
- 2 Identify which aspects of *Gleichschaltung* had the greatest impact and explain why.
- 3 Ian Kershaw argued that 'Despite the semblance of legality [taking the power from the states] was a plain breach of the Constitution'. Why do you think the Nazis tried to appear to be working within the limits of the constitution?
- 4 In pairs, work through a range of groups, such as workers, Jews, political opponents, civil service workers and lawyers. How was each group affected by Nazi rule? Why do you think there was limited opposition to the Nazis in this period?
- 5 Write a newspaper article about one of the events in the *Gleichschaltung* period. In your article ensure you include a range of reactions to the event.

7.3

RESTLESS STORMTROOPERS: THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES 1934

The threat of the Sturmabteilung (SA)

Alamy Stock Photo/Granger Historical Picture Archive



Ernst Röhm (1887–1934), the leader of the SA and one of Hitler's earliest supporters. Röhm and other leaders of the SA were murdered in the Night of the Long Knives in June 1934.

The Sturmabteilung (SA), or brown shirts, had been a major factor in the Nazis coming to power (see also pp. 111–112). They had fought the street battles and terrorised opponents, and now that the Nazis were in power they expected their reward. Led by Ernst Röhm, by 1934 the SA numbered some 3 million. 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 and the unemployed. They represented the left wing, or more radical element of the Nazi movement. Many believed in a form of socialism, which had been a policy of the early party but had been discarded by Hitler as the party came to power.

By 1934 Hitler believed that the Nazi revolution was over, but many in the SA shared Röhm's belief that the National Socialist revolution had not gone far enough. The wealthy privileged sections of German society, especially the industrialists and landowners, remained in place. Hitler had to retain the confidence of these groups and, in particular, the army.

In 1934 the SA was a restless and unstable force. The activities of its members endangered 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 SA presented a problem that had the potential to threaten the very survival of the Nazi regime. Röhm constantly displayed the power of the SA in a series of parades and marches, and there were rumours of a second revolution. Members demanded that they be rewarded for their contribution to the victory of National Socialism.



The army and the SA

The greatest problem was Ernst Röhm's belief that the SA, and not the regular army, should be the main military force in Germany. Röhm wanted the army incorporated into the ranks of the SA, and saw himself as the ultimate commander of this force.

The army leaders were totally opposed to any such idea, and saw the SA as a threat to the standing and honour of the German army. Hitler was also totally against the idea. In his view the SA had served its purpose, and now he needed 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.

The other problem for Hitler in 1934 was that President von Hindenburg's health was failing, and he had only a few months to live. When Hindenburg died, Hitler intended to abolish the office of president and take for himself the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces. To do this, he needed the backing of the army, not the SA. The army was the only remaining force in German society that could bring Hitler down – it was essential that it move its loyalty from Hindenburg to Hitler. One of the prices of that loyalty was the removal of the threat of the SA.

ERNST RÖHM AND THE 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 Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, Thorton Butterworth, London, 1939, p. 143.

SOURCE STUDY

QUESTIONS

- 1 What complaint is Röhm making here about Hitler and the Nazi movement?
- 2 Röhm claims that Hitler 'pals around' with army generals. Why would Hitler do this? Why would Röhm object to it?

The Night of the Long Knives, 30 June 1934

The army had made it clear that they expected the SA to be brought under control. In April 1934 Hitler met with army and navy leaders on board the pocket battleship *Deutschland* on his way to attend military exercises in East Prussia. In a secret arrangement, Hitler agreed to deal with the SA if, in return, the armed forces would support Hitler as Hindenburg's successor. Hitler also assured his commanders that the German armed forces would be 'the sole bearer of arms' in the Reich.

By June the army's patience was almost at an end. Röhm had been meeting with the former chancellor, Schleicher, and there were rumours that the SA planned to force a change of government. On 20 June Hitler had a brief but tense meeting with the ailing president. In the presence of the Defence Minister, General von Blomberg, Hindenburg told Hitler that unless the government resolved the present tension, the president would declare martial law and hand over government to the army. Hitler could delay no longer. The following day, on 21 June, he gave his approval for action against the SA leadership.



Night of the Long Knives

The role of the SS

The elimination of Röhm and the leadership of the SA was planned by Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler, the head of the Schutzstaffel (SS). Both men actively conspired to create the threat of a Röhm/SA conspiracy and both, particularly Himmler and his SS, who would carry out the purge, had much to gain from the elimination of the rival SA. Death lists were drawn up for what was code-named 'Operation Hummingbird'.

The army was not involved in the elimination of the SA, although there is little doubt that its leadership knew Hitler was about to act. On 25 June General von Fritsch, the commander of the German army, placed the army on alert and ordered all troops confined to barracks.

The elimination of Röhm and the SA leadership

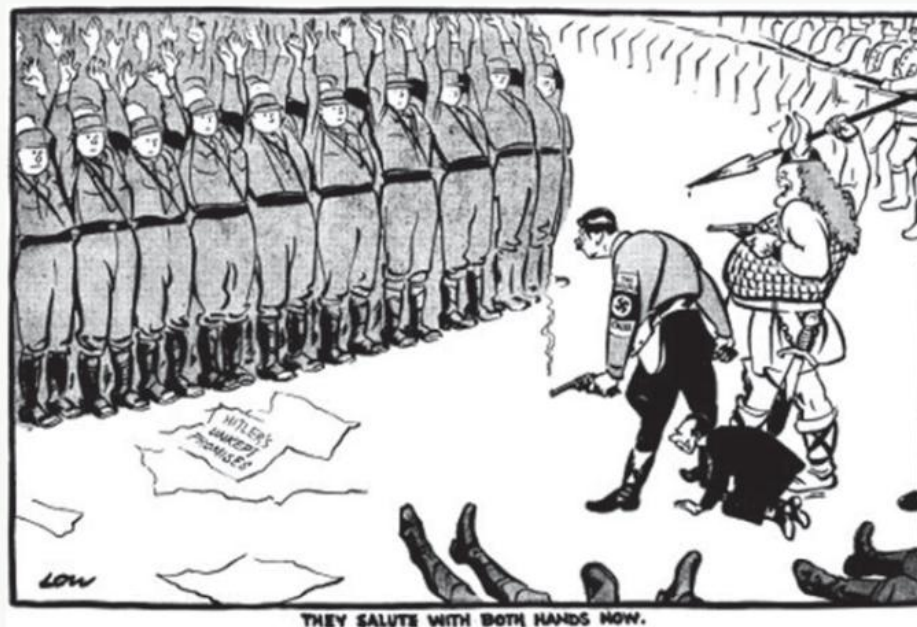
The so-called '**Night of the Long Knives**' took place on 30 June 1934. SS troops took the SA leadership by surprise and, in a coordinated activity in Berlin and Munich, Röhm and hundreds of SA officers were arrested and accused of plotting to overthrow the state. Hitler himself travelled to the Bavarian resort town of Bad Wiessee, where Röhm was on holiday, to personally supervise the SA leader's arrest.

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. Gregor Strasser, the once-loyal Nazi who had opposed Hitler in 1932 was also included on the death list. 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, more than 200 people were murdered. The army was pleased with the way Hitler had dealt with Röhm and the SA leadership, and offered little complaint when two of their number, General von Schleicher and General von Bredow, were also murdered in the process.

Privately, the Night of the Long Knives had shaken Hitler and he forbade any mention of the events in his presence. Publicly, the event not only reaffirmed the brutality of the regime but was also a major step in further strengthening Hitler's power base. In one move Hitler had put down the threat of the SA and satisfied the German army. 'The blood bath of 30 June 1934,' wrote British historian AJP Taylor, 'washed away the last scruples. It was the clear assertion that there was no turning back.'⁹ It was a view shared by Victor Klemperer, who kept a diary for much of the Third Reich. 'The horrible thing,' he wrote, 'is that a European people has delivered itself up to a band of lunatics and criminals and continues to tolerate them.'¹⁰

THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

SOURCE A



'They salute with both hands now': cartoon by David Low, 3 July 1934

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 Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 469.

SOURCE C: A message to the German army from the 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.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 216.

SOURCE D: President von Hindenburg's telegram to Hitler, 2 July 1934

From reports submitted to me I see that you, through your determined action and gallant personal intervention, have stopped treason in the bud. You have rescued the German people from a great danger. For that I express to you my heartfelt thanks and sincere appreciation.

With best wishes

von Hindenburg

Völkischer Beobachter, 3 July 1934.

SOURCE E: Law Concerning Measures Taken in Defence of the State, 3 July 1934

The Reich Government has resolved to pass the following law which is herewith promulgated:

Only article: 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

The Reich Chancellor

Adolf Hitler

Reich Minister of Justice

Dr Gürtner

Reichsgesetzblatt, I, 1934, No. 71, p. 529.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the point the cartoonist is making in Source A through his use of the swastika armband.
- 2 Identify the group in the top-right corner of the cartoon in Source A.
- 3 In what way does the cartoon support the statement made by Hitler in Source B?
- 4 Explain why the army gave silent support for the Night of the Long Knives.
- 5 Why was Hitler prepared to sacrifice the SA to gain the support of the army?
- 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 Explain why it should come as no surprise that President von Hindenburg telegraphed congratulations to Hitler after the Night of the Long Knives (Source D).
- 8 What does the law (Source E) say? Explain why Hitler would have insisted on the proclamation of the law of 3 July 1934.
- 9 How would Sources B and D be useful to a historian studying the Night of the Long Knives? In your answer, consider the purpose and nature of each source.



Front page of London's *Daily Mirror*, 3 August 1934

The death of President von Hindenburg

A month after the murder of Röhm and the SA leadership there was another death that occupied the nation when President von Hindenburg died, aged 87, on 2 August 1934. Hindenburg's death removed the last obstacle to Hitler's total control of the state. The Nazis were well prepared, and a new law, written 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.

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 opponents were being repressed with concentration camps and the secret police. Totalitarianism had triumphed. After Hindenburg's death, Hitler became the Führer (leader), supreme ruler of the German state.



Hindenburg's funeral



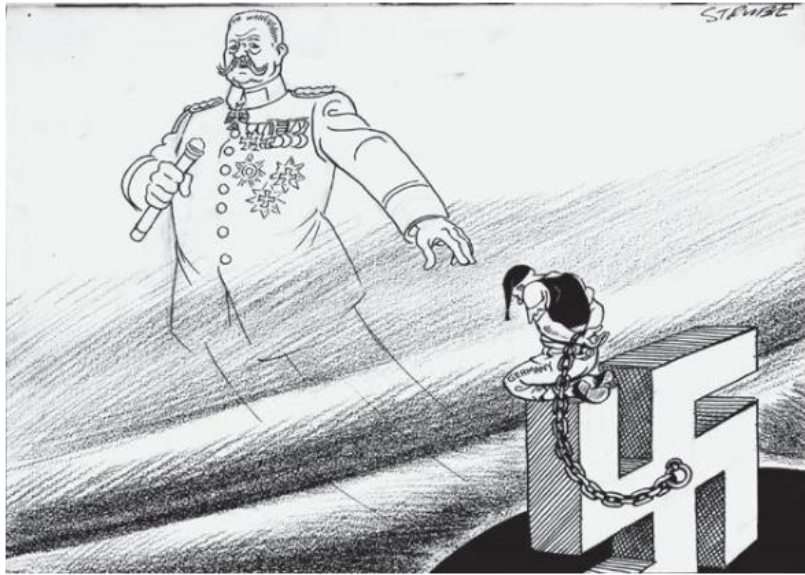
Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-16108 / Georg Pahl

Soldiers of the German army (the Reichswehr) swear an oath of loyalty to Hitler in 1934.

THE LAST STEP TO TOTAL POWER

- ◆ By 1934 the SA had grown to a powerful and unstable force within the German state, and appeared as a possible threat to Hitler's authority.
- ◆ The German army viewed the position and standing of the SA with increasing concern.
- ◆ As Hindenburg's health failed and Hitler planned to assume the powers of the president, he needed the support of the German army.
- ◆ On 30 June 1934, in what is known as the Night of the Long Knives, Hitler, with the SS, eliminated the leadership of his own SA, including his old comrade SA leader Ernst Röhm.
- ◆ The army was not involved in the elimination of the SA leadership but was supportive of the move.
- ◆ After the death of President von Hindenburg a few weeks later, 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.

- 1 Why was Hindenburg's death important for the Nazis' control of Germany?
- 2 Which positions did Hitler now hold as Führer?
- 3 Identify the message in this 1934 British cartoon.



This British cartoon by Sidney Strube was published in London's *Daily Express* on 3 August 1934, a few days after the death of President von Hindenburg.

- 4 Do you think this cartoon could have been published in Germany? Why / why not?
- 5 Why did Hitler have the army take an oath of loyalty to himself rather than the traditional oath of loyalty to the German nation?
- 6 Class discussion: How should Hindenburg be remembered in Germany today?
- 7 Research: Find articles that were published in international newspapers about the Night of the Long Knives. Compare and contrast their reporting of the event.

7.4

NAZISM AS TOTALITARIANISM

The democratic Weimar Republic began and ended in a situation of crisis. It is easy to overlook the 14 years of this democracy, from 1919 to 1933, and to see the republic as merely a prelude to the Nazi era that followed.

A genuine democracy has the following features:

- ◆ open and free elections, in which all citizens may participate
- ◆ an acceptance of the concept of majority rule
- ◆ competition for office by political parties and individuals
- ◆ elected citizens who represent all the other citizens in making decisions about laws and other matters
- ◆ a constitution accepted by the people that defines how the democracy will work
- ◆ equal protection to all citizens of the state
- ◆ equal rights of political participation and basic freedoms such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom to work, freedom from arbitrary arrest, and freedom of the press for all citizens.

All of this ended when the Nazis came to power; democracy collapsed almost without a fight. The Nazis came to power legally, according to the constitution, and then moved quickly to set up a totalitarian state, in which the government had total control.

How was it, asks British historian Ian Kershaw in the opening pages of his two-volume study *Hitler*, published in 1998, that a 'modern, advanced, cultured society can so rapidly sink into barbarity, culminating in ideological war, conquest of scarcely imaginable brutality, and genocide such as the world had never previously witnessed'?¹¹ Every historian of the Nazi era has addressed the same question.



Nature of the Third Reich

The concept of 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 World War I. Totalitarianism is something unique to the twentieth century. Earlier in history there were many forms of despotic government, 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 influence every aspect of daily life. It also differs from earlier forms of despotism or absolutism in that it is a movement that is usually based on some element of popular support.

Nazism as totalitarianism

In November 1939 a conference of historians met in the United States to discuss the similarities between the regimes of Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini. The historians argued that, despite the ideological differences, these regimes displayed key features in common. It was generally accepted that Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany were significant totalitarian regimes, and that Mussolini's Italy was too, but to a lesser degree.

Historical debate: Was Germany really totalitarian?

After World War II and throughout most of the 1950s the view of Nazi Germany, held by both by German and non-German historians, was that it had been a totalitarian state. It was dominated by a repressive dictatorship, using a form of terror that held the German people in control. The German people had been victims of this movement that in the end led to dreadful crimes, including genocide, a world war and the destruction of the nation. The features of a totalitarian state leave little doubt that totalitarianism is the opposite of liberal democracy.

Some characteristics of a totalitarian state

- There is a single, all-controlling political party, usually led by a **charismatic** leader. Other political parties are not allowed.
- The individual is subordinated to the will of the nation.
- An official ideology is promoted by the party.
- The state controls the economy.
- All aspects of mass communication are controlled.
- No opposition or criticism is tolerated.
- There exists a system of terror and a police state.
- There is a perversion (corruption) of the process of law.
- The moral and ethical codes that are a feature of a liberal democratic state are disregarded.
- The ideology and philosophy of the party in power are indoctrinated into all levels of society.

Features	Weimar Germany	Nazi Germany
	 <small>Shutterstock.com/krvinis</small>	 <small>Dreamstime/Sazoni</small>
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

In the 1950s, when the United States was in the depths of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, there was renewed interest in the concept of totalitarianism. It had been accepted that the old enemy, Nazi Germany, had been a totalitarian state, and it was easy to suggest that the new enemy, the Soviet Union, was no different. In 1956 two political scientists, Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski, defined six characteristic features of a 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 that was systematic and directed not only against enemies of the regime but also 'arbitrarily selected classes of the population'
- ◆ control over the armed forces of the state.

Since then, many historians have questioned this totalitarian model. In more recent times, some historians who have made detailed studies of the inner workings of the Nazi state question whether it is appropriate to label Nazism as an example of totalitarianism. They believe that there are important aspects of the Nazi state that simply do not fit this all-embracing concept. Criticisms of the model include the following.

- 1 Although the Nazi state appeared to be a rigid, organised, monolithic structure, the reality was in fact quite different. Stalin's Russia was almost certainly far more organised and rigid in its administrative structure.
- 2 In terms of its ideology, Marxism was a well-developed system of thought, whereas Nazism was essentially a vague ideology, more a plan of action than a systematic theory.
- 3 In Nazi Germany there was never the level of state ownership or control over the economy that developed in Stalin's Russia.
- 4 In Germany, despite the dominant position of the Nazi Party, the party still shared authority with a number of significant power groups that survived. These included the industrialists and the army. In Stalin's Russia the absolute monopoly of power rested with the Communist Party.
- 5 Hitler's movement relied on a degree of popular appeal, which was deliberately promoted by the propaganda ministry. In Stalin's Russia, although the cult of Stalin also emerged, there was no suggestion that the leadership sought popular appeal.
- 6 Historians like Hans Mommsen have suggested that Hitler was in fact a 'weak dictator', presiding over a state of 'unparalleled institutional anarchy' (see also pp. 227–29). Hitler, he suggests, was reluctant to make decisions and intervened only when it suited him or when there was no other option. There is no similar historical debate about Joseph Stalin.
- 7 One aspect of a totalitarian state is the role of systematic terror through a system of secret police. While there is no doubt that terror existed in Nazi Germany, recent research has thrown doubt on how all-embracing this terror was. Research into the role played by the Gestapo in Nazi Germany suggests it was not efficient or well organised, and that it was incapable of carrying out comprehensive surveillance of the German people – its operation depended more on informants for its work. Historians now question whether the terror of Nazi Germany was in fact 'systematic'. Indeed, its operation depended on the contribution and cooperation of ordinary Germans.
- 8 Research by historians who have studied everyday life in the Third Reich have suggested that Hitler's regime had a significant level of popular support and that most Germans accepted Hitler's government and were prepared to cooperate.

It was generally accepted that through the process of *Gleichschaltung* and the elimination of opposition to his regime, by 1934 Hitler had established a totalitarian state. Certainly by August 1934, with the death of Hindenburg, Hitler was and remained undisputed master of that state. While there was terror and coercion in Nazi Germany, recent historical findings now suggest that the regime also had a significant degree of consensus and support, and that the term 'totalitarian', once used to describe it, may now be inappropriate. The term 'dictatorship by consent' may be a better description of Nazi Germany.

- 1 What did Carl Friedrich and Zbigniew Brzezinski believe were the key features of a totalitarian state?
- 2 What are some of the key criticisms of the totalitarianism model?
- 3 How was Hitler's position transformed from 'legal chancellor' to 'legal dictator' in the period 1933–1934?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 To what extent had *Gleichschaltung* been successful by the end of 1934?
- 2 To what extent was Nazi Germany a totalitarian state by the end of 1934?

Endnotes

- 1 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, Praeger, New York, 1970, p. 193.
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- 3 Quoted in Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, Harper Collins, New York, 1992, p. 285.
- 4 William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Pan Books, London, 1960, p. 247.
- 5 Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History*, Pan Macmillan, London, 2001, p. 14.
- 6 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 230.
- 7 Quoted in Gordon Greenwood, *The Modern World*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1965, p. 522.
- 8 Richard Grunberger, *A Social History of the Third Reich*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1971, p. 118.
- 9 Alan JP Taylor, *The Course of German History*, Methuen, London, 1961, p. 250.
- 10 Victor Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Diaries of Victor Klemperer, 1933–1941*, translated by Martin Chalmers, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1998 diary entry, 14 July 1934, p. 122.
- 11 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1896–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. xx.

GERMANY 1929–1934: THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY AND THE FAILURE OF GERMAN DEMOCRACY

- 1 On an A3 sheet or butcher's paper, create an annotated timeline for the period 1929–1934. On your timeline, mark key events related to the rise of the Nazis. You should consider events related to the following.
 - Impact of the Great Depression
 - Election results
 - Appointment of leaders
 - Collapse of democracy
 - Important legislation
 - Gleichschaltung*
 - Death of Hindenburg
- 2 Place these five headings in the order you feel reflects their importance in explaining the rise of Hitler and his movement. Prepare a paragraph response to each to explain how each contributed to the success of the Nazis.
 - A Nazi Party tactics
 - B The Great Depression
 - C The weakness of the Weimar Republic
 - D The role of Hitler
 - E The weakness of others
- 3 'The collapse of the Grand Coalition was the beginning of the end.' With reference to this statement, explain how democracy was weakened in the period 1930–1933.
- 4 Select two of the following and explain how these two events helped bring Hitler to absolute power by 1934.
 - A The Reichstag Fire
 - B The Enabling Act of 1934
 - C The Night of the Long Knives
 - D The death of President von Hindenburg
- 5 'There was nothing inevitable about Hitler's political victory in 1934. To the very end, his political opponents could have kept him from power.' To what degree do you agree with this statement?
- 6 Which groups were brought under control in the *Gleichschaltung* period?
- 7 Research the experiences of a group that was targeted by the Nazis between 1933 and 1934. Using a range of primary sources, give a presentation to the class, explaining what life was like for your chosen group during this period.



bpb/Hinrich Pund sack

Entrance to Hamburg Railway
Station, Germany, 1941

The Nazi State

CHAPTER 8

LIFE IN NAZI GERMANY

CHAPTER 9

PERSUASION AND PRESSURE

CHAPTER 10

THE RACIAL STATE: POLICY AND PRACTICE

9780170410106

Life in Nazi Germany

8.1

HITLER'S ROLE IN THE NAZI STATE

8.2

SOCIAL LIFE IN THE THIRD REICH

8.3

CULTURAL LIFE IN
NAZI GERMANY

8.4

ECONOMIC LIFE IN
NAZI GERMANY

A Berlin street in 1933, shortly
after Hitler came to power



placeholder photo acknowledgement

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KEY WORDS AND TERMS

autarky

Self-sufficiency. Autarky or self-sufficiency in raw materials and food was a key aim of the economic policy in the Reich.

concordat

A treaty or agreement signed between the Holy See (the Vatican) and another nation, which deals with church or religious matters.

Confessional Church

The Protestant church organisation set up in 1934 by clergy and theologians who opposed the

Nazis' attempts to influence and control the Protestant churches.

Edelweiss Pirates

German youths, mainly of working-class background, who opposed the Hitler Youth movement and organised resistance against it. Some of them were executed.

encyclical

A letter of major importance written by the Pope and circulated to the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical entitled *With Burning Anxiety* in 1937 in which he criticised the Nazi regime.

eugenics

The science of improving the quality of a race through selective breeding.

Papal Nuncio

The representative of the Pope and the Vatican City in another country. The Papal Nuncio has the status of an ambassador.

sterilisation

The process, through medical intervention, of making a person incapable of having children.

Life in Nazi Germany

1933

JANUARY

The official unemployment figure in Germany reached almost 6 million.

MAY

The burning of un-German books took place across the Reich.

JUNE

The SS assumed control of the concentration camp system.

JULY

Germany and the Holy See (Vatican City) signed a concordat protecting the rights of the Roman Catholic Church in Germany.

OCTOBER

The Editorial Law was passed, giving the government control of the press.

NOVEMBER

Strength Through Joy and the Bureau of the Beauty of Labour were set up as part of the German Labour Front.

1934

JUNE

The Night of the Long Knives. The SS became an independent organisation, no longer part of the SA.
The *Law for the Promotion of Marriage* was passed.

SEPTEMBER

Leni Riefenstahl made the film *Triumph of the Will*.

1935

MARCH

Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles by reintroducing conscription.

1936

AUGUST

The Olympic Games opened in Berlin.

SEPTEMBER

The Four-Year Plan for economic self-sufficiency and rearmament commenced. The *Lebensborn* program began under the control of the SS.

1937

MARCH

Pope Pius XI issued his encyclical *Mit Brennender Sorge* (*With Burning Anxiety*), which attacked aspects of Nazi rule in Germany.

JULY

Hitler opened the House of German Art in Munich.

NOVEMBER

Hjalmar Schacht resigned as Minister for Economics.

1938

JANUARY

Unemployment in Germany dropped to 1 million.

AUGUST

Germans were invited to place orders for the Strength Through Joy car (the Volkswagen).

TIMELINE

8.1

HITLER'S ROLE IN THE NAZI STATE

Führerprinzip (the 'leadership principle')

After President von Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler assumed the presidential powers and abolished the title of Reich President. He wished to be known as the *Führer und Reichskanzler* (Leader and Reich Chancellor). The term *Führer*, or 'leader', was all-embracing and clearly suggested that Hitler had total authority.

Hitler had very clear ideas about the role of the leader in Germany, the so-called *Führerprinzip* or 'leadership principle', and he had made them clear in his book *Mein Kampf*. An all-powerful leader would emerge who would end the divisive and weak democratic system and replace it with an authoritarian state. By 1934 this had already been achieved. The democratic Weimar Constitution had been suspended, and the Nazi newspaper *Völkischer Beobachter* reminded Germans that from now on 'Our constitution is the will of the Führer'.¹ 'The Führer,' wrote a Nazi official in 1935, 'is the bearer of the people's will. He is independent of all groups ... in his will the will of the people is realised, he shapes the collected will of the people.'² The leader would have the total and absolute obedience of the people as he fulfilled his mission and led the Germans towards their destiny. He was a man apart, above the day-to-day workings of the state.

Creating the Hitler myth

After the Nazis came to power there was a deliberate and persistent effort to promote the Führer as the heroic leader of the German people. The creation of this so-called Führer myth was the work of the Nazis themselves, in particular the Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels. An image of Hitler as leader of the Nazi Party had been developed before 1933, and now this was expanded to influence the great majority of the German people.

In the controlled mass media and in deliberate and structured images of the Führer, Hitler was projected as the person 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 hero, the man for whom the nation had been waiting. 'It is the miracle of our age that you found me ... among so many millions,' Hitler said in 1936, 'and that I found you is Germany's great fortune.'³ There is little doubt that Hitler would have believed this.

His Propaganda Minister 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 interest. Other themes that were highlighted were the image of strength and authority, and his resoluteness in dealing with Germany's enemies, such as the communists and later the threat from the SA.

There were a number of important factors that assisted in the creation of this powerful Hitler myth. It was supported by Germany's past tradition of heroic leaders, including Frederick the Great, who had created the modern Prussian state in the eighteenth century, and Bismarck, who had created the unified German nation (the Second Reich) in the nineteenth century. After the humiliation of defeat in World War I 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 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. In a sense, 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 until the collapse of the regime in 1945. For much of his time as the leader of Germany Hitler enjoyed genuine and significant popular support, and this support and mass appeal helped maintain the Nazi regime. Though there were difficulties and failings in government, Hitler was always seen as above these, and certainly not the cause of them. They were the fault of officials, lesser people, but not the Leader.



This photo showing female admirers reaching out to touch Hitler's hand was released by the Propaganda Ministry with the heading 'All hands stretch out towards the Führer', demonstrating the personality cult of Hitler.

The concept of 'Führer power', 1939

The Führer unites in himself the whole sovereign power of the Reich. All public power in the state as in the movement stems from the Führer's power. We must speak not of state power, but of Führer power (*Führergewalt*) ... it is comprehensive and total ... all members of the community are obliged to give loyalty and obedience to the Führer ...

Ernst Huber, *Verfassungsrecht des Grossdeutschen Reiches*, Berlin, 1939, p. 213.

Why did the Hitler myth develop?

- ◆ It developed from the longstanding Führer or leadership principle in the Nazi Party.
- ◆ It developed as a reaction to the long period of disorder and weak government in the Weimar years.
- ◆ It was developed by the deliberate and calculated propaganda of the Nazi regime.
- ◆ There was already a tradition in German history for a strong leader, the so-called 'authoritarian tradition'.
- ◆ It was helped by the real successes the Nazis achieved after they came to power.
- ◆ Hitler's position in the eyes of many Germans was linked to the concept of charismatic authority, the idea that Hitler was sent with the historical mission of a saviour, and he was the cause of all success.

The idea of charismatic authority

The German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) was the first to put forward the idea of a rare leader emerging whose his followers give them a special, almost messianic standing (revered as one who will deliver their people). Although Weber had in mind profound religious leaders like Jesus and Mohammed, many historians have looked at the concept of 'charismatic leadership' to explain Hitler's following in Germany. Before he came to power, Hitler was projected as the man who would deliver the Germans from the suffering and humiliation of the past. Once he came to power he was credited with achieving the success that Germany was beginning to experience.

These were very real successes. In the mid-1930s the German economy revived, unemployment fell, agriculture recovered and the German middle class did well. Even some sections of the German working



Charismatic authority

This official portrait of Hitler taken in 1938 was intended to convey the image of a man of destiny, chosen by fate to lead the German people.

class, who had never fully supported the regime, were won over as their standard of living improved. There were more successes in foreign policy. The Treaty of Versailles was ignored, Germany rearmed itself and German territory was regained. 1940 brought the greatest of all successes with the military defeat of France in a mere six weeks. All of this was presented as being the result of the Führer's will and inspired leadership. With the persistent onslaught of propaganda, it was hard for the doubters to doubt.

Although he exercised power by virtue of the position he held and the political structure he had created, Hitler's power and authority also depended in large measure on how the Germans saw him. British historian Ian Kershaw suggests that Hitler derived his power from 'what he saw as his historical mission to save Germany. His power, in other words, was charismatic not institutional. It depended on the readiness of others to see heroic qualities in him. And they did see those qualities—perhaps even before he himself came to believe in them'.⁴ As long as Hitler achieved success, charismatic authority sustained him. But if Hitler was responsible for Germany's success he would also be responsible for its failures, and when those failures came, as they did during the war, Hitler's standing diminished.

THE HITLER MYTH

SOURCE STUDY

Historian Ian Kershaw on the Hitler myth, 1985

Unquestionably, the adulation of Hitler by millions of Germans ... was a crucial element of political integration in the Third Reich ... Without the degree of popular backing which Hitler was able to command, the drive, dynamism, and momentum of Nazi rule could hardly have been sustained ... Nor could Hitler himself have remained impervious to the extraordinary cult which had been created around him and which came to envelop him. His own person gradually became inseparable from the myth ... the more he succumbed to the allure of his own Führer cult, and came to believe in his own myth, the more his judgment became impaired by faith in his own infallibility.

Ian Kershaw, 'The Hitler Myth', in *History Today*, November 1985.

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to Kershaw, what was one of the key reasons for promoting the Hitler cult?
- 2 What effect did this endless promotion of Hitler have on Hitler himself?
- 3 Which leading Nazi helped to create the Hitler myth?

Hitler – the reality

Volker Ullrich, a German historian who published a new biography of Hitler in 2016, offered new insights into the German leader. While in no way disputing the great evil of his actions and his 'insane ideological fixations', Ullrich sought to understand Hitler as a human being, suggesting that

this 'strange character of a man' possessed all kinds of qualities, not all of them bad. Ullrich also challenged the long-held view that Hitler was a lonely isolated figure without family or friends. This view, first offered by one of Hitler's earliest biographers, Konrad Heiden, in the 1930s, argued that Hitler was incapable of normal human relationships and could only connect with people en masse. Ullrich questioned this view, which has been maintained in historical literature, and sought to 'normalise' Hitler and look beyond the traditional view of the monstrosity of the man.⁵ He argued that Hitler did in fact have a private life, albeit a pretty boring one, and he did have friends, most of them married couples, and a smaller group of close friends.

The manufactured image of an inspired, heroic leader was quite different from the reality. Hitler's complex personality has been the subject of a great deal of research. From these studies, Hitler emerges as a highly complex man who probably had a dual nature and could be different things to different people. He was a man capable of great brutality and ruthlessness, but he could also display great personal charm and show consideration and kindness. There was nothing exceptional about his physical appearance except for his prominent blue eyes, yet those who met him usually referred to his magnetic presence and charismatic personality.

THE REALITY

SOURCE A: Extracts from a broadcast by Propaganda Minister Dr Goebbels, 1935

There is probably no one on the planet who does not know him as a statesman and a remarkable popular leader ... one cannot imagine him putting on a front. His daily meals are the simplest, most modest imaginable ... he avoids medals and decorations ... his government approves no laws that he has not studied ... he has sacrificed his personal happiness and private life. He knows nothing other than the work he does as the truest servant of the Reich.

Goebbels' radio broadcast to the German people on Hitler's birthday, 20 April 1935.

SOURCE B: Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and later Minister for Armaments, on Hitler's working habits

I threw all my strength into my work and was baffled by the way Hitler squandered his working time ... when I would ask myself did he really work? He rose late in the morning and conducted one or two official conferences, but from lunch on he more or less wasted time until the early hours of the evening ... in the eyes of the people Hitler was the Leader who watched over the nation day and night. This was hardly so.

Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1970, p. 131.

SOURCE C: Hitler's work habits, by the historian Volker Ullrich

Nevertheless there is little truth to the idea that Hitler's bohemian pretensions left him incapable of doing concentrated work. When necessary ... he could devote himself to his political tasks with great diligence. Sometimes he would disappear for days ... As a politician, the Führer oscillated between phases of seeming lethargy [laziness] – in which he actually, away from the public eye, thought intensely about his plans – and periods of feverish, almost frenetic activity.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, p. 401.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What do the three sources agree on? What do they disagree on?
- 2 Which of the three sources is likely to be the most reliable? Justify your answer.

Despite Goebbels' claim that Hitler 'knows nothing other than the work he does', the reality was that Hitler's lifestyle was influenced by his artistic temperament. He disliked the restraints of regular routine, particularly the paperwork and day-to-day details of his office. After he became chancellor, he read very little and wrote even less. He took little interest in the details of government, believing that most problems would solve themselves if he didn't get involved. He constantly deferred making decisions, bringing an element of chaos to government.

Hitler lived a very erratic lifestyle. He disliked the German capital, Berlin, and when he wasn't travelling throughout the Reich, he preferred to retire to his mountain home, the Berghof, built in splendid alpine country near the small town of Berchtesgaden in southern Germany. Here his daily routine was anything but busy. His day usually began late in the morning and was punctuated by meals and afternoon walks to a teahouse he had built not far from his home. After the evening meal there were usually movies, or Hitler held court with his inner circle. He suffered from insomnia and rarely went to bed before two or three in the morning.

He always preferred the spoken word and in fact spoke incessantly, as if carried away by the sound of his own voice and the certainty of his opinions. 'He created by speaking,' observed one who saw him at close quarters. 'He thought things through while he was talking.'⁶ He could overreact, and often did, when people disagreed with him. In the later years he could not tolerate any questioning of his views or opinions. One person who experienced an angry Führer was Franz von Pfeffer, who was dismissed from the SA after an argument with Hitler in 1930. 'He just started screaming, yelling at me,' Pfeffer wrote. 'A thick blue vein swelled in his forehead, and his eyes bugged out ... I feared he was going to hurt himself.'⁷

Hitler was a vegetarian with a great weakness for chocolates and cream cakes. He neither drank nor smoked, and forbade anyone to smoke in his presence. He loved fast cars but never learnt to drive. He loved architecture and classical music, particularly the heroic operas of the German composer Richard Wagner, and he also had a fondness for American movies. He enjoyed the company of women but remained unmarried until the last week of his life. For many years he had a discreet relationship with Eva Braun, whom he met in the late 1920s. She was never allowed to appear in public with Hitler, and most Germans were unaware of her existence. Hitler and Braun married in April 1945 and committed suicide together a day later.

Hitler had little interest in money or the luxuries that came with his position as leader. This aspect of his character was often used to promote the image of Hitler as a withdrawn, solitary man carrying the heavy burdens of government. Compared with other high-ranking Nazis, Hitler lived a simple existence. For him the exercise of absolute power was enough. The Germans were reminded that he even refused to take a salary, although he did receive royalty payments from *Mein Kampf*, and since his portrait was used on Germany's postage stamps he also received a royalty for every stamp sold in the country.

He had constant fears about his health and developed signs of hypochondria (fear of ill health). He was scared of cancer, which had claimed his mother, and he kept a number of doctors in his inner circle who administered regular drugs and vitamin injections. As the war situation worsened after 1943 Hitler became increasingly dependent on an array of drugs, including amphetamines administered by his doctor, Theodor Morell.

HUMANISING HITLER

SOURCE A: From the German historian, Volker Ullrich

'Are we permitted to depict Hitler as a human being,' the German media asked in 2004 with the release of Bernd Eichinger's film *Downfall*, which depicted the Führer ... during his final days in the bunker in Berlin. The only answer is: not only are we permitted, we are obliged to. It is a huge mistake to assume that a criminal on the millennial scale of Hitler must have been a monster ... For a long time this tendency to demonise Hitler dominated historical research and prevented us from having a clear view of the actual man.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, p. 8.

SOURCE B: 'Book review: *Hitler: A Biography, Volume I: Ascent, 1889–1939*, by Volker Ullrich', by Roger Moorhouse, *Financial Times*, 12 March 2016

There is a wider significance to this 'normalisation' of Hitler. For too long after the Second World War – and particularly in Germany – Hitler was viewed almost as an alien life form that had descended among humankind to wreak havoc. Recognising Hitler's humanity is therefore a significant step, not least in the acknowledgment that he, too, was one of us.

Roger Moorhouse, 'Book review: *Hitler: A Biography, Volume I: Ascent, 1889–1939*, by Volker Ullrich', *Financial Times*, 12 March 2016.

SOURCE C

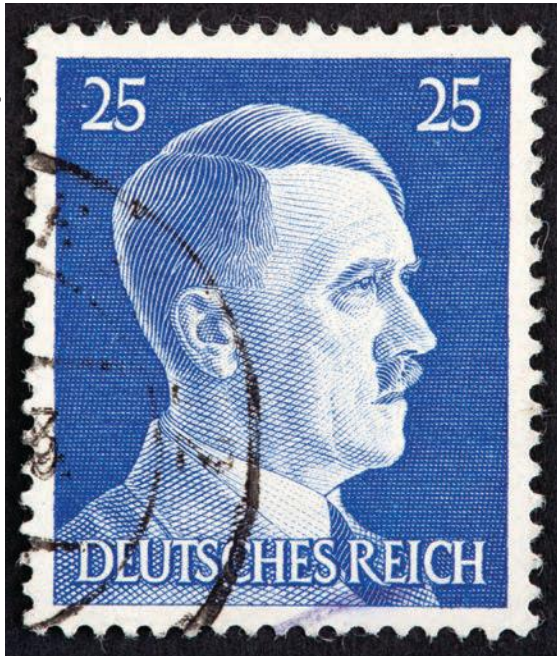


Alamy Stock Photo/ZUMA Press, Inc.

Adolf Hitler with Eva Braun at Hitler's residence in southern Bavaria. With them is Gitta Schneider, daughter of Braun's friend Herta Schneider.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the common point being made in all three sources?
- 2 Explain why, until fairly recently, public opinion had difficulty seeing Hitler as 'a human being' or 'one of us'?



Hitler's portrait was on most German stamps and he received a royalty for each stamp sold, making him a wealthy man.

What has long fascinated historians is how this man rose from the utmost obscurity, without any real education or formal training, to become master of Germany and then master of much of Europe. British historian Alan Bullock, who wrote one of the first major biographies of Hitler, refers to the absolute belief Hitler had about himself, his sense of mission, his determined willpower and his single-mindedness. But no historian can deny that Hitler also had considerable political gifts. When he wanted to be, he was capable of bursts of sustained energy and concentration.

Hitler was perhaps the greatest demagogue of modern times and he understood the psychology of the masses. As an orator and public speaker Hitler had the power to control and convince his audience. 'He put into words what they were longing to hear,' wrote one historian, 'feeding on their hidden resentments, playing on their anxieties, unleashing elemental passions and forcing his listeners to surrender their will to that of the leader ... he was a man possessed, a mass psychologist of diabolical genius.'⁸ Hitler never reasoned with an audience, he simply demanded that they believe. But he also had other abilities that carried him forward:

- ◆ He had a very good grasp of history and military strategy, and those who met him were frequently impressed by the range and depth of his knowledge.
- ◆ He had a superb memory – a 'photographic memory', some historians claim – as well as the ability to quickly understand technical facts and details.
- ◆ He was a skilful opportunist who also had a brilliant sense of timing. He could perceive opportunities faster than most and knew just when to move.
- ◆ He had persistence and patience, and a rare ability to read his political opponents. These skills helped Hitler into power, and it was only later, when he came to believe in his own image and infallibility, that these skills deserted him.
- ◆ Above all, he believed in the power of the will. This had carried the movement to success against all odds and difficulties.

The real nature of government in Nazi Germany

Hitler was the source of all authority and power in Nazi Germany. 'The point cannot be stressed too strongly,' wrote American historian Norman Rich, 'Hitler was master in the Third Reich.'⁹ However, beneath the all-powerful Führer, the German state was certainly not the monolithic and ordered structure it appeared. Despite the portrayal of Nazi Germany as a strict, organised and disciplined state, historians agree that what existed was not a rigid, disciplined government but what some have called a chaotic structure of government.

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. The administrative system as it developed after 1933 was in fact a collection of rival and overlapping groups, all seeking to exercise power and influence. The various ministries of the civil service sought to carry on with the business of government, but they found themselves in conflict with new organisations created by the Nazi Party. Nazi Party officials who had fought for power were not prepared to be controlled by state or civil service agencies. As a result, there was duplication and rivalry.

Hitler also deliberately encouraged duplication in government, and would frequently set up a special body or agency to deal with an issue that could have been handled by an existing government body. The Ministry for Labour found itself in competition with the German Labour Front, set up by the party in 1933 to control trade union activity. The Ministry for Economics, under the control of the very able Hjalmar Schacht, had difficulty dealing with Germany's economic growth when in 1936 Hitler appointed Hermann Göring as chief of the Four-Year Plan for economic self-sufficiency. Joseph Goebbels, as Minister for Propaganda, controlled all media outlets including the press, yet Hitler appointed his old friend and publisher of *Mein Kampf*, Max Amann, as Reich Leader of the Press, putting him in charge of an agency that was in competition with Goebbels's Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda.

GERMAN HISTORIAN SEBASTIAN HAFFNER

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.

Sebastian Haffner, *The Meaning of Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1979, p. 43.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point being made by historian Sebastian Haffner in this extract.
- 2 Why did it suit the Nazis to destroy the 'state's ability to function'?
- 3 Explain what Haffner meant by '... absolute rule was not possible in an intact state, but only amidst controlled chaos'.

Hitler's style of government



imagefolk/Many Evans/IBL Collections

The enormous red marble office in the new Reich Chancellery in Berlin, built for Hitler by his architect, Albert Speer. The office was rarely used by Hitler, who hated office routine.

In the twelve years of his rule in Germany, Hitler produced the biggest confusion in government that has ever existed in a civilised state ... he removed from the organisation of the state all the clarity of leadership. It was not all laziness ... It was intentional. With this technique he systematically disorganised the upper levels of the Reich leadership in order to develop and further the authority of his own will until it became a despotic tyranny.

Otto Dietrich, *Zwölf Jahre mit Hitler (Twelve Years with Hitler)*, Isar, Cologne, 1955..

This situation of administrative chaos was not helped by Hitler himself. Although he was the source of ultimate authority in Germany, he 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 little direction in the area of domestic policy. As the Führer, his prestige could not allow him to become involved in minor administrative conflicts. The administrative structure that in the past had served Germany so well became blurred.

Hitler usually failed to provide clear and absolute direction, interfering only in those areas of government that interested him, and usually in a very haphazard way. He was reluctant to intervene in conflicts between 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.

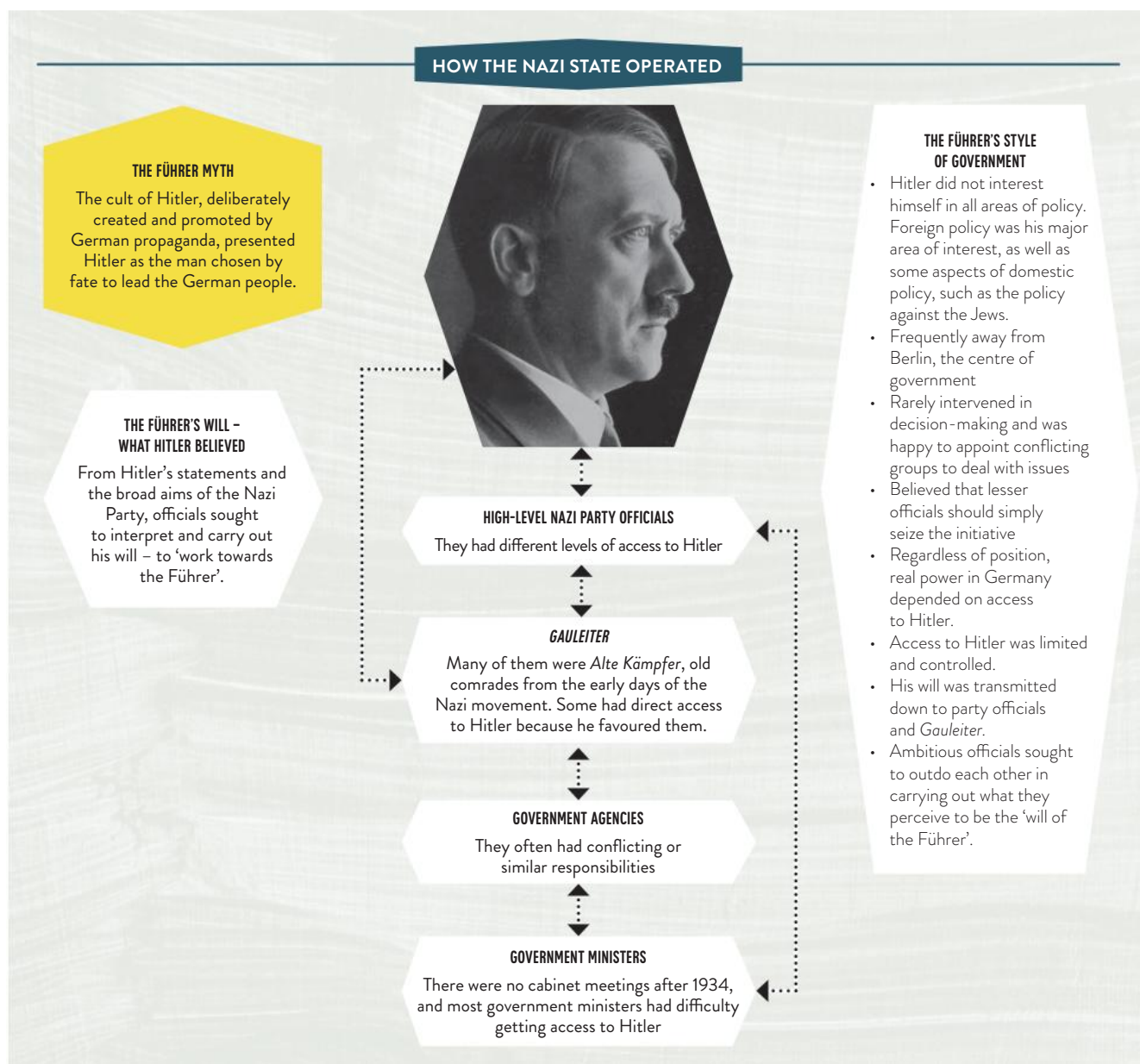
'Working towards the Führer'

British historian Ian Kershaw reaffirmed that the Third Reich was not an efficient and organised state, as earlier historians had assumed, but one in which officials in government competed and operated without clear direction from above. Their task was to interpret the will of the Führer, and to carry out what they believed this will to be. In February 1934 Werner Willikens, a minor official from the Agricultural Ministry, gave a speech that clearly expressed the concept.

Everyone who has the opportunity to observe it knows that the Führer can hardly dictate from above everything which he intends to realise sooner or later. On the contrary, up till now everyone with a post in the new Germany has worked best when he has, so to speak, worked towards the Führer ... in fact it is the duty of everyone to try to work towards the Führer along the lines he would wish.

Werner Willikens, 21 February 1934, quoted in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Vol 2, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 207.

What Willikens is saying is that the way to advancement in the Nazi system was to anticipate the Führer's will and promote what one believed to be Hitler's intentions. As a result, the regime became increasingly radical as officials sought 'to trump one another with ever more extreme demands and measures'.¹⁰



WORKING TOWARDS THE FÜHRER

SOURCE A: Ian Kershaw on '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 Darwin jungle of the Third Reich, the way to power and advancement was through anticipating the 'Führer will' and without waiting for directives, taking initiatives to promote what were presumed to be Hitler's aims and wishes.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1889–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. 530.

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SOURCE B: Neal Ascherson, 'Hopping in his matchbox', review of Volker Ullrich's *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*

'Working towards the Führer' explains how many initiatives, including some of the worst, originated in the wider Nazi bureaucracy rather than with Hitler himself. And it can be argued that this commandment to second-guess and anticipate Hitler helped him to surf into ever more radical and terrible policies which are usually attributed to his invention alone ... a chaotic, 'Darwinian' struggle of overlapping Nazi institutions raged as each competed to make up Hitler's mind for him. Behind all this was the weird, slovenly manner in which Hitler formed policies. Sometimes he made rapid and fateful choices and stuck to them (the Night of the Long Knives in 1934). But often he watched a policy emerge from some underling who thought he was 'working towards the Führer', and then adopted it as his own 'irrevocable decision' ... It could be said that the 'Willikens Insight' cuts Hitler's personality down to a more manageable size. It shifts responsibility, if not away from him, then onto a much wider circle of German officialdom working in this curious machine of government-by-anticipation.

Neal Ascherson 'Hopping in his matchbox', *London Review of Books*, vol. 38, 2 June 2016.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What can you infer from Source A about the impact that 'working towards the Führer' had on Nazi Germany?
- 2 How far do you agree with Sources A and B about the way that Hitler operated? Explain your answer using both sources and your own knowledge.

Historical debate: The nature of the Führer state

The intentionalists

For some time there has been debate among historians as to how Hitler should be seen in the context of the Third Reich. One school of historical opinion has argued that Hitler was at the absolute centre of the regime, and that everything can be explained in terms of the force of his personality and ideas. This has produced a school of historians who have sought to explain the Nazi era by concentrating on Hitler himself. The historians of this school of thought are sometimes grouped as the 'intentionalists'. They argue that Hitler had clearly defined ideas and a deliberate program, and that he pursued these ideas with ruthless consistency and intent. They believe that Hitler can be seen as someone who intentionally worked to bring his plans to reality. Intentionalist historians suggest that:

- ◆ Hitler was an historical figure who shaped events.
- ◆ Hitler was master of Germany and his ideas and demands were never challenged.
- ◆ Hitler had a world view (see page 118) and everything he did was influenced by this.
- ◆ Hitler, who followed a 'divide and rule' strategy, deliberately encouraged duplication in government and rivalry among party officials, creating a chaotic government structure. True to his belief in struggle, Hitler preferred to let matters take their course, with the stronger prevailing over the weaker.
- ◆ The friction and conflict that occurred within the Nazi state as people competed for influence and power prevented the emergence of any organisation or group that could challenge Hitler. The aim of *Gleichschaltung* had not been to create an efficient state but rather, a Führer state (*Führerverfassung*) with all authority vested in the leader.
- ◆ Hitler was in every sense a strong dictator with a clear and defined intent to all he did.

The most respected of the intentionalist scholars were British historians Hugh Trevor-Roper and Alan Bullock, who wrote two significant works, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny* (1952) and *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (1991). The German intentionalists include historian Joachim Fest, who wrote *Hitler* (1973), Klaus Hildebrand, who wrote *The Third Reich* (1984) and Eberhard Jäckel. Historian Karl Dietrich Bracher, who wrote *The German Dictatorship* (1970), even suggested that Nazism should perhaps be more accurately called 'Hitlerism'.

The structuralists: Was Hitler a 'weak dictator'?

There is, however, another school of historians who are uneasy with this interpretation and its overemphasis on Hitler, concerned that it does not give a true picture of the important social, political and economic factors that were at work. They seek to address what made Hitler possible. They believe the intentionalist argument does not explain the complexity of the Nazi state and the interplay of forces like the army, the SS, economic and social forces, international relations and the role of other leading Nazis. While not denying the importance of Hitler, they argue that there were other groups in Nazi Germany that shaped policy. The historians who take this position have been called the 'structuralists', because the focus of their research has been on the structure of the Nazi state.

The first major historian to explore this idea was Edward N Peterson in his 1969 work *The Limits of Hitler's Power*. In this book Peterson gives clear evidence of the confusion in the Nazi state and the competition and rivalry among different groups, not only in government but also in the army and big business.

Among the leading historians who have taken this study further are Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen. In his book *The Hitler State* (1969), Broszat gives an impressive analysis of the internal power structure in Hitler's Germany, seeing it as a 'polycratic state' (one with many competing and overlapping layers). Broszat suggests that the focus should be on the structures within the Nazi state and less on the role of Hitler himself. No historians dispute that this power structure was chaotic, as an array of competing groups and agencies sought to exercise power, but the Hitler-centred historians would argue that this was a deliberate tactic of Hitler, used to strengthen his own position.

Was Hitler a weak dictator?



Getty Images/Hulton Archive/Print Collector

Hitler disliked regular routine, and only intervened in matters that were of interest to him. He much preferred the more relaxed life away from the capital city of Berlin.

Two post-war German historians, Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, firmly established the idea of Hitler as a weak dictator in historical debate. Broszat's book *The Hitler State* came out in 1969. He emphasised the interaction of Germany's institutions in the generation of policy. He developed the idea that Hitler did not so much create policy as give his approval to whatever of the various competing parts of the state had succeeded in seeing off its rivals. During the next decade Hans Mommsen developed this line of argument. He maintained that Hitler led through propaganda rather than bureaucratic organisation and command.

Martyn Housden, 'Hitler: A Weak Dictator?' in *Modern History Review*, September 2002.

The structuralist historians, on the other hand, argue that this chaos evolved out of Hitler's weakness and his inability or unwillingness to impose his authority and establish a rigid, well-defined system of government. Was Hitler really a strong dictator in the style of Stalin in the Soviet Union? Hitler's regime was never the efficient system that developed under Stalin, and unlike Stalin, Hitler actually shared power with conservative groups such as the industrialists and the army. Having won power, the Nazis 'had no clear idea of what to do with it, apart from attacking the Jews, the Left, and other "enemies of the state".¹¹

German historian Hans Mommsen has taken the structuralist argument further, and was the first to use the phrase 'weak dictator' in reference to Hitler. In his 1971 article 'Nationalsozialismus' (National Socialism), he suggested that the function of the Nazi state should be seen as a system of 'unparalleled institutional anarchy and increasingly divorced from practical reality in the process of decision-making', and that the system was held together only by the Führer myth. Structuralist historians suggest that:

- ◆ Hitler himself was 'reluctant to take decisions, often uncertain, concerned only in maintaining his own prestige and personal authority', that he was in many ways 'a weak dictator'¹²
- ◆ Hitler's reluctance to intervene came from a sense of his own inadequacy and hesitancy, and that he was concerned at the impact unpopular policies would have on groups in German society, particularly the working class
- ◆ the lack of strong rule by Hitler contributed to the increasing radicalisation of the regime as the conflicting and competing agencies of government sought to interpret and implement the Führer's will
- ◆ Nazism became a movement that could not tolerate stability. It required, in the words of historian Klaus Epstein, 'the incessant mobilisation of the German people against foreign and domestic enemies and an atmosphere of permanent crisis justifying the use of exceptional measures.'¹³

But was Hitler really a weak dictator? A more recent study by Ian Kershaw, in his book *The Nazi Dictatorship – Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (1985), has suggested that Hitler could be considered weak:

- ◆ if he was not prepared to make decisions
- ◆ if he took no steps to protect his image and standing
- ◆ if his decisions and directives were ignored or not implemented
- ◆ if the structure in the state limited or prevented his freedom to move on any policy or idea.

It could be argued that none of these 'weaknesses' applied to Hitler.

It is true that Hitler did not intervene in much of the decision-making, but was this weakness or was it a deliberate wish to preserve his charismatic authority, the myth of the Führer, which was so central to the Nazi state? Hitler defined the general direction of the party and its ideology and then placed himself above the day-to-day in-fighting of the regime. It could be argued that Hitler wanted

the so-called chaotic structure beneath him, which is what developed, and that he wanted to stand apart from the political squabbles, which also happened.

The fact that, although Hitler was not involved in many decisions in the Nazi state, nothing was done unless it followed his general views suggests that Hitler was in fact anything but weak, and there is no real evidence that the directives and decisions he handed down were ever ignored. Hitler's broad views on political leadership and the structure of government, his racial policies and his foreign policy plans all came about. Others might add the examples of Hitler's decisiveness and leadership in the long struggle for power, in the brutal elimination of the threat from Röhm and the SA, and in his foreign policy successes in the 1930s. For a 'weak leader' Hitler was remarkably good at getting his own way, facing no real challenges to his will and holding power to the very end.

As a result of the structuralist/intentionalist debate of the 1980s, we now have a much better understanding of how the Nazi regime functioned. Ian Kershaw believes that this new understanding should be based on a synthesis of both the structuralist and intentionalist positions. He believes it is essential to study both the importance of Hitler and the setting or structure in which he operated in order to understand the nature of the Third Reich and the role of Hitler. This is a position that has gained greater acceptance in the study of the Third Reich.

THE ROLE OF HITLER IN THE NAZI STATE

- ◆ There has been major historical debate about the role of Hitler in the Third Reich.
- ◆ Some historians (including Karl Dietrich Bracher, Klaus Hildebrand and Joachim Fest) see Hitler as a strong dictator.
- ◆ Hitler had a deliberate program and set of ideas, which he intended to carry out.
- ◆ Bracher suggests that Nazism could more accurately be called 'Hitlerism'.
- ◆ Another school of historians (including Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen) accepts the importance of Hitler, but has concentrated on the structure of the Nazi state.
- ◆ The chaotic system that existed within the Nazi state could be seen as suggesting that Hitler was a 'weak dictator', unable or unwilling to intervene.
- ◆ Hitler remained a charismatic leader above the functioning of the state.
- ◆ The structuralists suggest that this competition and conflict in government and the lack of strong, involved leadership were factors that caused the increasing radicalism of the regime.
- ◆ Historians have now moved on from the structuralist and intentionalist interpretations. Ian Kershaw believes that our understanding of the Nazi era should be based on a synthesis of both.

8.1 SUMMARY

- 1 The image of Hitler as leader of Germany was deliberately controlled for political purposes. Prepare two columns, entitled 'Hitler – as seen by the German people' and 'Hitler – as seen by those close to him'. In each column write the character traits that each group would have observed.
- 2 Explain the concept of 'working towards the Führer'.
- 3 Outline the main points made by both the intentionalists and the structuralists about the nature of the Nazi state.
- 4 Essay question: Assess the importance of Hitler to the Nazi state. Refer to the work of at least one historian to support your answer.

8.1 QUESTIONS

8.2

SOCIAL LIFE IN THE THIRD REICH

The People's Community

The Nazis saw their 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 the state but also to reshape it according to their ideology.

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 of class division and social conflict, which would be replaced by a new sense of national unity. It was a community where all racially pure Germans were equal, and one in which all 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 folk (*Volk*) 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 would all 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. In the early years of World War I and in the trenches, class division had given way to a sense of national unity. National Socialism looked back to this idealised vision and sought to recreate German society in this way. This was the 'socialism' part of National Socialism. After the political and social divisions of the Weimar era, it was a concept that had great appeal.

VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT

SOURCE STUDY

SOURCE A: The idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*

According to National Socialist ideology the *Volksgemeinschaft* would result from the creative activities of the German Volk ... the Volk community was a national union in which each individual knew their place within the larger whole and in which every aspect of life furthered the good of the community. The notion of Volk had a mystical tone. It was at once the people, the nation and the race ... the mission of National Socialism was to re-establish the Volk community by bringing an awareness of race, blood and soil among all Germans.

Benjamin Sax and Dieter Kuntz, *Inside Hitler's Germany: A Documentary History of Life in the Third Reich*, Heath, London, 1992, p. 178.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the term *Volk*.
- 2 Which groups would be united in the *Volksgemeinschaft*?
- 3 Which groups could not be part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*?
- 4 Why was breaking down class barriers important to the *Volksgemeinschaft*?

SOURCE B: British historian Alan Bullock on the *Volksgemeinschaft*

After the Nazi takeover Hitler was both presented and seen by the party and by millions of Germans outside it as the embodiment of *Volksgemeinschaft* or 'national unity', standing above all sectional interests; the architect of Germany's recovery, personally incorruptible; a fanatical defender of German honour ... a man of the people, a corporal who had won the Iron Cross First Class and shared the experiences of the common soldier at the Front ... His appeal cut across class and religious boundaries, affecting both young and old, men and women.

Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, Harper Collins, London, 1991, pp. 410–11.

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to Bullock, what were the Nazis seeking to achieve with the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*?
- 2 According to Bullock, how did Hitler's background and image encourage people to think of Germany as a 'People's Community'?

After 1933 many Germans believed that the nation was entering a period of revival. Historian Sebastian Haffner has suggested that before World War II Germans could be divided into two groups: Nazis and loyal Germans. The Nazi regime deliberately promoted this feeling of a national revival with a new sense of purpose. Hitler and his movement offered the people a new Germany, and in the 1930s this satisfied the hopes and expectations of millions of the German people. Hitler himself was very popular, and many came to see him as a saviour, the man forging a new unity among the German people and saving the state from the social and economic divisions of the past. He was presented as a man sent by God who put the nation before himself. He took no salary, lived simply, without extravagance or pretence, and he was a man who knew no class, only Germans.

The degree to which the Nazis carried out a social revolution after 1933 has also generated debate among historians. Some believe there was significant social change, with the 'socialism' of National Socialism producing a more egalitarian society, one where class differences also began to break down. In this sense they suggest that the Nazi state before the onset of war in 1939 marked the true start of the modernisation of Germany.

Other historians do not see evidence of a real social revolution in Nazi Germany, suggesting that the changes were more in appearance than reality, and that German society remained very much the same. They point to the reactionary nature of many social changes, such as the treatment of women, noting that although some social elites were weakened, new social elites created by the Nazi state emerged to take their place.

'What Hitler and the Nazis wanted,' wrote British historian Richard Evans, 'was a change in people's spirits, their way of thinking, and their way of behaving. They wanted a new man and for that matter a new woman to emerge out of the ashes of the Weimar Republic.'¹⁴

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.

The Nazis believed that individuals found their true fulfilment through identification with the nation or national community. Everyone had a role in this society, which was to be accepted without question. For women this was a lesser role, because 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 woman held a high position in Nazi Germany, and women 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. Single women were allowed to work, but there was a deliberate policy to force married women out of the workforce and into the home. Particular professions were closed to women. They were forbidden to practise law, and the admission of women to universities was drastically cut, from more than 18 000 in 1933 to just 5000 by 1939. Only unmarried women aged over 35 could hold permanent positions 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, women remained strong supporters of Hitler and his movement. Many women were pleased to return to the more traditional role of obedient wife and loving mother, accepting that men and women had different roles in life and that the place of women was in the home. The German Women's League was set up to define and encourage the new role of women in the Reich. Its leader, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, held the impressive title of Reich Women's Leader, but she was never counted in the party leadership or included in policy decisions concerning women.

The role of women was confined to the role of family life and motherhood. 'The mission of women,' said Dr 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.'¹⁵ The slogan often used was 'Children, Church and Kitchen' (*Kinder, Kirche und Küche*). 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. Women were discouraged from smoking or wearing make-up. German women were expected to be homely, concerns about fashion were considered un-German, and weight reduction and slim figures were considered bad for childbirth.

The German birth rate had been declining since World War I and the Nazis were determined to reverse this trend. They introduced policies 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') families, and these families gained concessions such as reduced gas and electricity bills and rail fares.

Under the *Law for the Promotion of Marriage*, enacted 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. One quarter of the loan was cancelled on the birth of each child. The loan was said to be *abgekindert*, 'childed off'. Between 1933 and 1939 more than 1 million marriage loans were granted, and the marriage rate increased by 20 per cent. 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*) – bronze for four children, silver for six and gold for eight or more. Mothers wearing the gold cross were entitled to be saluted by the Hitler Youth.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NAZI GERMANY



bpk / Liselotte Purper (Orget-Köhne)

A German family in 1939, the mother wearing the Mother's Cross

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain how this photo reflects the Nazi view of the role of women and the family.
- 2 Based on your understanding of the Mother's Cross, what level of the award (bronze, silver or gold) is this mother entitled to?

Before a couple could marry, there were strict checks on the racial purity of the man and the woman. Interracial marriages were forbidden, and after 1935 the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour* made it illegal for a German to marry a Jew. The birth rate did increase, from 14.7 births per thousand in 1933 (970 000 babies) to 20.4 births per thousand in 1939 (1 400 000 babies), but after 1939 it declined again. Many believe that the increase in the birth rate 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 government's attempts, 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 actually undermined the family unit. The Nazi focus on the young created tensions between the generations, and family unity was strained by the constant demands of the state, with family members involved with the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, and an educational system that promoted ideas that often caused tension between children and their parents.



Women in Nazi Germany

HITLER ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN

The slogan 'Emancipation of Women' was invented by Jewish intellectuals. In the really good times of German life the German woman had no need to emancipate herself ... if a man's world is said to be the State, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community, then it may perhaps be said that the woman's is a smaller world. For her world is her husband, her family, her children, and her home ... We do not consider it correct for the woman to interfere in the world of man in his main sphere. We consider it natural if these two worlds remain distinct.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 364.

I detest women who dabble in politics ... In no section of the Party has a woman ever had the right to hold even the smallest post. In 1924 we had a sudden upsurge of women who were interested in politics. They wanted to join the Reichstag, in order to raise the moral level of that body, so they said. I told them that ninety per cent of the matters dealt with by parliament were masculine affairs, on which they could not have opinions of any value.

Adolf Hitler, 26 January 1942.

Intelligence, in a woman, is not an essential thing. My mother for example would have cut a poor figure in the society of our cultivated women. She lived strictly for her husband and her children. They were her entire universe. But she gave a son to Germany.

Hugh Trevor-Roper (ed), *Hitler's Table Talk 1941–1944*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1953, p. 359.

QUESTION

- 1 What do these document extracts tell us about Hitler's attitude towards women and the place he believed that women should occupy in German society?



A maternity home of the *Lebensborn* organisation, with the SS flag displayed

'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 (shame) associated with illegitimacy was reduced. In 1941 the production and distribution of contraceptives was banned.

Because every pure German child was important, the *Lebensborn*, or Spring of Life, program began in 1936. 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 and 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 families in the conquered territories (especially Denmark and Norway), to be placed with German families.

Nazi Racial Bureau

The Reich Racial Bureau was a department of the Nazi Party established in 1933 to promote the concepts of racial awareness and the preservation of the Aryan master race.

Ten rules to be observed when considering a marriage partner (1934):

- 1 Remember you are a German.
- 2 Remain pure in mind and spirit!
- 3 Keep your body pure!
- 4 If hereditarily fit, do not remain single!
- 5 Marry only for love.
- 6 Being a German, only choose a spouse of similar or related blood!
- 7 When choosing your spouse, inquire into his or her forebears!
- 8 Health is essential to outward beauty as well!
- 9 Seek a companion in marriage, not a playmate.
- 10 Hope for as many children as possible! Your duty is to produce at least four offspring in order to ensure the future of the national stock.

FROM A MEMBER OF THE LEAGUE OF GERMAN MAIDENS

We were told from a very early age to prepare for motherhood, as the mother in the eyes of our beloved leader and the National Socialist Government was the most important person in the nation. We were Germany's hope for the future, and it was our duty to breed and rear the new generation of sons and daughters. These lessons soon bore fruit in the shape of quite a few illegitimate small sons and daughters for the Reich, brought forth by teenage members of the League of German Maidens. The girls felt they had done their duty and seemed remarkably unconcerned about the scandal.

Ilse McKee, *Tomorrow the World*, Dent & Sons, London, 1960, p. 43.

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to Source A, who was seen as the most important person in Germany?
- 2 What were teenage girls taught was their duty to Germany?
- 3 What evidence in this document supports the view that Nazi policies towards women and children would have caused tensions within traditional family life?

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NAZI GERMANY

- ◆ The Nazis believed that the role of women should be centred in the home as wives and mothers.
- ◆ Laws were made and financial incentives provided to help increase the birth rate.
- ◆ Historians have questioned how successful the Nazis' policies to promote the birth rate were.
- ◆ Women were discriminated against in the workforce, denied employment in many professions and rewarded for having children.
- ◆ In the war years the Nazis sought to bring women back into the workforce in order to meet the labour shortages, but many women were reluctant to do this.



Members of the League of German Maidens perform a folk dance at the Nuremberg Party Congress in 1938.

Preserving racial purity

One of the major priorities of the Nazis was the need to preserve the purity of the German race. Hitler believed that civilisations failed when they were unable to maintain racial purity. If his Reich was to last a thousand years, the pure Aryan population had to grow, and threats to the racial purity of the German race had to be removed. In part, this influenced his thinking on the role of women.

The Nazis also believed in **eugenics**, the idea of improving a race through selective breeding. This concept had been around since the nineteenth century and Germany was not the only nation to embrace it, but with the power of the absolute 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 disabilities. The aim was to prevent these people with so-called 'bad genes' from having children, thus eliminating 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 these conditions was 'feeble-mindedness', a condition that could be interpreted in many ways. Between 1934 and the end of the war close to 400 000 people were sterilised.

EUGENICS

SOURCE A

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Hans Pauli



A eugenics poster entitled 'The eradication of the sick and weak in nature'. This poster was one of a series used for educational purposes. The German quotation reads: 'That which does not satisfy the demands of Being, collapses.'



SOURCE B

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.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Who is likely to be the intended audience of the eugenics poster?
- 2 What is the purpose of the poster?
- 3 How does the law of July 1933 presented in Source B fit in with what you know of the Nazi concept of race?

The Hitler Youth

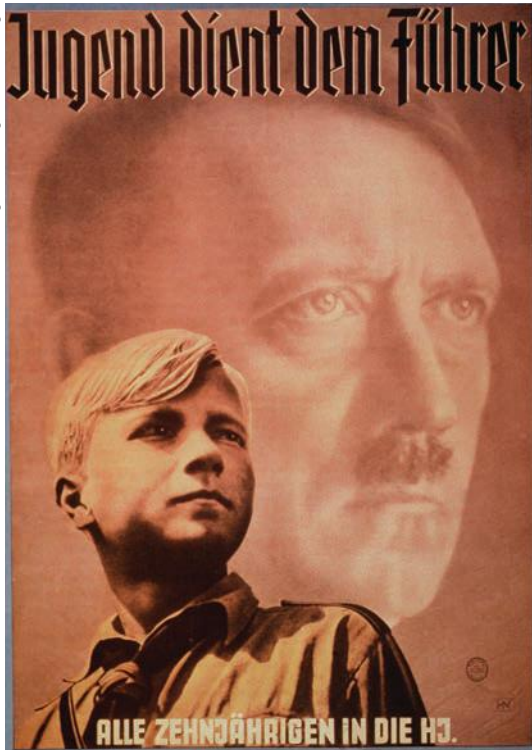
If the Third Reich was to endure, it was essential for the regime to win the loyalty of the next generation. For this reason, the Nazis placed great importance on controlling the youth of Germany. It was important that the next generation supported the racial and social principles of the Nazi movement.

The Hitler Youth (*Hitler Jugend*) movement was formed as part of the Nazi Party as early as 1922. It was called the Youth League, but it remained a relatively small organisation, placed under the overall control of the SA. In July 1926 the Youth League, which had been banned with the rest of the party after the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch, was renamed the Hitler Youth. In March 1931 the leadership of the Hitler Youth was given to Baldur von Schirach, whom Hitler appointed 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.

In July 1930 the female equivalent of the Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls, was set up. Both youth movements supported party activities by handing out electoral materials and taking part in marches and rallies. A number of the Hitler Youth were killed in the street brawls that were frequent in the years before the Nazis came to power. In 1929 the Hitler Youth took part in the Nuremberg Party Rally for the first time.

Year	Membership	Percentage
1932	200 000	1.5
1934	3 500 000	46.5
1936	5 400 000	62.8
1938	7 100 000	77.2

The percentage of the German population aged 10 to 18 years who were members of the Hitler Youth movements, 1932 to 1938



A poster for the Hitler Youth. The poster reads, 'Youth serves the Führer. All ten-year-old boys into the Hitler Youth.'



Members of the Hitler Youth on an orientation/map-reading exercise, 1935

After the Nazi Party came to power, other youth organisations, including the Boy Scouts and all sporting clubs, were gradually closed down. For a while the youth groups of the Roman Catholic Church survived because of the **concordat** signed with the Vatican, but in the late 1930s they too were banned. The aim was to bring the entire German youth under the Hitler Youth. In December 1936 a law was passed making membership of the Hitler Youth compulsory for all German boys aged 14 to 18 years. By the time the war broke out in 1939, membership of the Hitler Youth stood at 7.2 million. To administer this organisation, more than 8000 full-time and more than 700 000 part-time youth leaders carried out the tasks associated with it.

The Hitler Youth aimed to control and shape the entire youth of the nation to ensure they would support the philosophy and aims of the Nazi state. Boys aged six to 10 years were encouraged to join the *Pimpf* (Little Fellows) and move to the *Jungvolk* (Young People) from the age of 10 to 14. These young boys were expected to engage in hiking and other 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. 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 placed great emphasis on physical activity, including hiking and camping trips. Boys were expected to be able to long jump 2.75 metres, and to run 60 metres in 12 seconds. 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. 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 was devoted to the youth, and thousands of Hitler Youth were transported to Nuremberg to meet their Führer. At the Nuremberg Rally in 1935 some 54 000 Hitler Youth paraded before their leader.

Boys	
6–10 years	The Little Fellows (<i>Pimpf</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>Jungmädelbund</i>)
14–18 years	League of German Maidens (<i>Bund Deutscher Mädel</i>)



Hitler Youth organisations

'Youth Marches' – a Hitler Youth song

Our flag flies out before us
We march into the future together
We're marching for Hitler and going forth with pride
With the flag of youth for freedom and courage
Our flag flies out before us
Our flag is the new era
And the flag leads us to eternity
Because the flag is greater than death.

LAW MAKING THE HITLER YOUTH A STATE ORGANISATION, 1 DECEMBER 1936

The future of Germany is dependent on its youth. Therefore all German youth must be prepared for its future duties.

The Reich Government has decided upon the following law which is herewith decreed:

Article 1: All German youth in the territory of the German Reich is brought together in the Hitler Youth.

Article 2: All German young people, outside their homes and schools, are to be educated in the Hitler Youth, physically, spiritually, and morally, in the spirit of National Socialism for service to the nation and the national community.

Louis Snyder, *Hitler's Third Reich: A Documentary History*, Nelson Hall, Chicago, 1981, p. 241.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the purpose of this law?
- 2 Explain what you think was intended by the statement 'all German youth must be prepared for its future duties'?
- 3 From this law, what can you infer about German teenagers' involvement in the Hitler Youth before 1936?

League of German Maidens

The girls' equivalent of the Hitler Youth was the *Jungmädelsbund* (the League of Young Girls) for girls aged 10 to 14 years and 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 more than 1.5 million girls were active in the League of German Girls. 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 women's role 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.



bpk | Bayerische Staatsbibliothek | Heinrich Hoffmann

Hitler greeting girls from the League of German Maidens on the occasion of his 50th birthday in April 1939

Resistance in the 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 there were problems in the Hitler Youth movement. Nazi officials grew increasingly concerned at elements of resistance and non-conformity as thousands of young people grew 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 folk community. Although the idealism and energy of the Nazi movement did appeal to many German youths, recent historical research suggests that the Nazis were only partially successful in winning the loyalty of the young.

REMEMBERING THE LEAGUE OF GERMAN MAIDENS (*BUND DEUTSCHER MÄDEL*)

SOURCE A

Hitler wanted to bring greatness, happiness and well-being to this Fatherland; he wanted to see to it that everyone had work and bread; he would not rest or relax until every German was an independent free and happy person in that Fatherland. We found this good and we were determined to help to the best of our ability.

But there was one more thing that attracted us with a mysterious force and pulled us along—namely the compact columns of marching youths with waving flags, eyes looking straight ahead, and the beat of drums and singing. Was it not overwhelming this fellowship? Thus it is no wonder that all of us—Hans and Sophie* and the rest of us—joined the Hitler Youth.

Inge Scholl, *The White Rose*, Blackie, London, 1967, p. 60.

*Inge Scholl's brother Hans and sister Sophie (both mentioned in this extract) were executed in February 1943 for their involvement with the White Rose, an organisation of university students in Munich that opposed the Nazis. They were beheaded the day their trial ended (see page 301).

SOURCE B

The weekends were crammed full with outings, camping, and marches when we carried our heavy packs on our backs. It was all fun in a way and we certainly got plenty of exercise, but it had a bad effect on our school reports. There was hardly ever any time now for homework ... We were of course lectured a lot on National Socialist ideology and most of this went right over our heads. In most cases the young girl leader did not know herself what she was talking about. We were told from a very early age to prepare for motherhood, as the mother in the eyes of our beloved leader and the National Socialist government was the most important person in the nation. We were Germany's hope in the future and it was our duty to breed and rear the new generations of sons and daughters who would carry on the tradition of the thousand-year Reich.

The boys' evening classes were run in exactly the same way. Frequently we would all have to go to the auditorium where some important personage would give a lecture on racial problems and the necessity of raising the birth rate. He too would remind us of our duty as future fathers and mothers of the nation and somehow I never managed to suppress a giggle when I looked at those spidery-legged pimply cockerels who were supposed to become the fathers of our children.

Ilse McKee, *Tomorrow the World*, Dent & Sons, London, 1960, pp. 7–8.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was it that moved the young people in Source A to join the Hitler Youth?
- 2 Can you offer reasons why talks on National Socialist ideology 'went right over our heads'?
- 3 What evidence does Source B provide about the type of activities that young people were involved with in the Hitler Youth?

THE HITLER YOUTH

SOURCE A: Hitler's May Day speech to the German Youth, 1935

My German Youth! Today you must belong to Germany alone. And just as you belong to Germany, so must Germany be able to be proud of you ... great things are happening at the present time, but all will be in vain if you do not guarantee a lasting German future. You are a link in the chain of German destiny. See to it then that the link is strong.

Quoted in Norman H Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 1, H Fertig, New York, 1969, p. 541.

SOURCE B: Speech to the Hitler Youth at the Nuremberg Party Rally, September 1935

What we wish from our German youth is different from what past generations asked. In our eyes the German youth of the future must be slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather and hard as Krupp steel ... Nothing is possible if there is not a single will which issues commands and which the others must always obey, beginning from above and ending only at the lowest point. And that is alongside of the training and hardening of the body, the second great task ... We must educate our whole people so that wherever one is appointed to command, the others recognise their duty to obey ... that is the expression of an authoritarian state, not of a weak chattering democracy.

Quoted in Norman H Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 1, H Fertig, New York, 1969, p. 544.

SOURCE C: 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 Norman H Baynes, *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 1, H Fertig, New York, 1969, p. 544.

SOURCE D: The House that Hitler Built

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 of this 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 established in power forever ... Their attitude of mind is absolutely uncritical. They do not see Hitler as a statesman with good and bad points, to them he is more than a demigod. Time out of number they answer my queries [about] why they believed by the reply 'Because the Führer wills it!'

Stephen Roberts, *The House That Hitler Built*, Methuen, London, 1937, pp. 205–207.

SOURCE E



Stiftung Topographie des Terrors

An image from a preschool reading book, 1936

QUESTIONS

- 1 Using Hitler's speeches to the Hitler Youth (Sources A and B) as your evidence, explain what the main aims and functions of the youth movement were.
- 2 Identify the main point Hitler is making in Source C.
- 3 Professor Stephen Roberts was an Australian historian who visited Germany in 1936 and saw the Hitler Youth. How similar are his observations to those in Source C?
- 4 Explain what Professor Roberts means by the comment in Source D that 'he who has control over the elementary schools for five years is established in power forever'.
- 5 How does Roberts' role as an Australian visitor to Germany affect the reliability of his comments on the nature and impact of Nazi policies towards children?
- 6 Which of the sources most accurately represents the image from the children's book, Source E?
- 7 With reference to at least two sources, outline the nature and impact of Nazi policies for children and youth.

Education in Nazi Germany

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.

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 was of the highest order. All of this changed after 1933.

The Nazis regarded the aim of education as indoctrination, and they opposed intellectual thought and free inquiry. Education had to be controlled so it reflected traditional German values and served the purposes of the state. Boys and girls were educated separately and they were taught subjects that reflected their future role in German society. Girls did domestic courses, no foreign languages, and basic maths and science. The more demanding levels of mathematics and science were taught only to boys. There were major changes and a new emphasis in the curriculum. History and biology were important subjects, and all children had to study a new subject entitled 'Science of the Races'. Sports and physical activity received great attention. Although he took little exercise himself, Hitler preached the importance of physical activity in the young. He believed that it made them bold and strong. It taught the boys toughness and hardship, and was vital in building the health of the future mothers of the Reich.

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 Nazi ideas on race received special attention at all levels of schooling. Teachers were required to instruct their pupils 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'.¹⁶ History courses were 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 book for special study. Religious education was made optional, and was later abolished.



Getty Images/Bettmann

A German classroom in 1933

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

SOURCE A: Hitler on the education of the young

That which is weak must be hammered away ... Youth must have nothing weak and tender about it ... I want my youth strong and beautiful. I will have it trained in all physical exercises. I want an athletic youth. This is the first and most important thing ... I do not want any intellectual education. With knowledge my youth will be spoiled.

Hermann Rauschning, *Gespraeche mit Hitler*, Europa Verlag, New York, 1940, p. 237.

SOURCE B: Guidelines for teachers from the National Socialist Teachers' Federation handbook (1937)

National Socialism is an ideology whose claim to validity is total and does not wish to be subject to the random formation of opinion ... German youth must be consciously shaped according to principles which are recognised as correct and which have shown themselves to be correct—the principles of the ideology of National Socialism.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 432.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What did the Nazis see as the role of education in the Third Reich?
- 2 Why would the regime be opposed to 'formation of opinion' (Source B)?

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 encountered little trouble from the teaching profession. Many teachers held conservative views, and the freedom and openness of the Weimar era had not been to their liking. Most teachers accepted the new regime without resistance, and the number of teachers who joined the Nazi Party was the highest for any profession. In 1936 some 32 per cent of teachers 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 academies with their emphasis on duty and discipline. Also, carefully selected students were sent to the Adolf Hitler Schools (*Adolf Hitler-Schule*) to study a specialised curriculum that included political and racial studies.

Before 1933 Germany had the finest universities in Europe, but in Nazi Germany the quality of teaching fell as courses were revised to place more emphasis on science and technology. Jewish staff were removed and other academics who valued intellectual freedom also left, many moving to countries like 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, and by the late 1930s university professors were complaining about the quality of the students in university courses, all of them the result of the Nazi educational system.

THE EXPERIENCE OF EDUCATION

SOURCE A: 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.

Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1989, p. 148.

SOURCE B: 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?

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

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. Often many people who would like to see and greet the Führer stand in front of it. 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. And the little one ate and ate until she could eat no more.

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.

George 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	Reading material
1–4	Pre-war Germany, the class war, profits, strikes	The Jew at large!	Hauptman's <i>The Weavers</i>
5–8	From Agrarian to Industrial State Colonies	The peasant in the claws of the Jews!	Descriptions of the colonies from Hermann Lons
9–12	Conspiracy against Germany, encirclement, barrage around Germany	The Jew reigns! War plots	Beumelburg: <i>Barrage ... Life of Hindenburg, Wartime Letters</i>
13–16	German struggle – German want Blockade! Starvation!	The Jew becomes prosperous! Profit from German want	Manke: <i>Espionage at the Front</i> War reports
17–20	The Stab in the Back Collapse	Jews as leaders of the November insurrection	Pierre des Granges: <i>On Secret Service in Enemy Country</i> Bruno Brehm: <i>That Was the End</i>
21–24	Germany's Golgotha Erzberger's Crimes! Versailles	Jews enter Germany from the East Judah's triumph!	Volkman: <i>Revolution over Germany</i> Feder: <i>The Jews</i> The <i>Stürmer</i> newspaper

25–28	Adolf Hitler National Socialism	Judah's foe!	Dietrich Eckart: <i>My Struggle</i>
29–32	The bleeding frontiers Enslavement of Germany The Volunteer Corps Schlageter	The Jew profits by Germany's misfortunes Loans (Dawes, Young)	Beumelburg: <i>Germany in Chains</i> Wehner: <i>Pilgrimage to Paris</i> Schlageter – a German hero
33–36	National Socialism at grips with crime and the underworld	Jewish instigators of murder The Jewish press	Horst Wessel
37–40	Germany's Youth at the helm! The Victory of Faith	The last fight against Judah	Herbert Norkus The Reich Party Congress

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 and D?
- 2 How is Hitler depicted in Source C? Why was material such as this distributed to very young children?
- 3 Identify the key themes in Source D that were being developed in the history course taught in Nazi Germany after 1934.
- 4 Research: Who were Horst Wessel and Herbert Norkus? Why would the Nazis want students to study their actions in their history classes?

EDUCATION IN NAZI GERMANY

- ◆ The Nazis saw education as a form of indoctrination and control.
- ◆ School courses were rewritten to reflect the philosophy of the Nazi state.
- ◆ There was a different emphasis in boys' and girls' education, though all were taught history, biology and the Science of the Races, and all were involved in physical games.
- ◆ The teaching profession as a whole accepted the Nazi movement, and teachers made up the largest group of any profession in the Nazi Party.
- ◆ Special schools trained elite students for future roles in the Nazi Party.
- ◆ The quality of education declined during the Nazi period.

Religion in Nazi Germany

National Socialism and Christianity were two totally conflicting sets of beliefs. 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, both represented a rival system of beliefs, an alternative 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.



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 (The Vatican).

This treaty 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 of the concordat 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 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 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 issued an **encyclical**, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (*With Burning Anxiety*), in which he accused the Nazis of breaking the terms of the concordat. The Pope condemned the persecution of the Roman Catholic Church in the Reich, called it 'illegal as it is inhuman' and accused the Nazi regime of spreading 'discord, hatred and fundamental hostility to Christ and His Church'. His message was read during Easter services in 1937 in most Catholic churches in Germany.

HITLER RESPONDS TO THE ENCYCLICAL OF POPE PIUS XI, WHICH CRITICISED VIOLATIONS OF THE CONCORDAT, 1 MAY 1937

SOURCE STUDY

We cannot allow this authority, which is the authority of the German people, to be attacked by any power whatsoever. This applies to the churches. As long as they concern themselves with their religious problems the state does not concern itself with them. But as soon as they attempt, by any means at all, by letters, encyclical etc. to take to themselves the rights which belong to the state, we shall force them back to their proper spiritual and pastoral activities. They are not entitled to criticise the morals of the state.

Max Domarus, *Hitler, Reden und Proklamationen 1932–1945*, vol. I, Munich, 1965, p. 690.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why is Hitler concerned by the Catholic Church?
- 2 Which 'morals of the state' are the Catholic Church likely to criticise?

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 Mueller, who was appointed Protestant Bishop of the Reich.

FROM THE YEARBOOK OF THE EVANGELICAL REICH CHURCH, DECEMBER 1933

We German Christians believe in our Saviour Jesus Christ, in the power of His cross and in His resurrection ... Germany is our task, Christ is our strength ... As for any other nation the eternal God created for our nation a law that is peculiar to its own kind. It took shape in the Leader, Adolf Hitler, and in the National Socialist state created by him ... the Saviour confronts the German people and gives it the strength of faith. From this community of German Christians there shall grow a German Christian National Church embracing the entire people in the National Socialist state of Adolf Hitler. One nation! One God! One Reich! One Church!

Joachim Beckmann (ed.), *Kirchliches Jahrbuch für die Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*,
Bertelsmann Verlag, Gütersloh, 1948, p. 32.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain how the Evangelical Reich Church reconciled its religious views with life in the Third Reich.
- 2 What can you infer about the place of religion in Germany from 'One Nation! One God! One Reich! One Church!'?

This attempt to unify the Protestant churches caused deeper divisions and more than 6000 Protestant clergy formed the **Confessional Church**. This group opposed the Nazis' attempt to control and 'Nazify' the Protestant faith, and produced a number of leaders who, with great courage, spoke out against the regime. In May 1934 they condemned 'the false teaching by which the state is equated with the sole and total order of human life'.¹⁷ Among those who spoke out was Pastor Martin Niemöller, a former World War I U-boat commander. Although he had supported the Nazis in the early days, he became completely disillusioned as they sought to control religious expression. 'For us,' he said, 'it is a question of which master the German Protestants are going to serve. Christ or another.'¹⁸ He was imprisoned in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, and later at Dachau, 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. When Cardinal Pacelli, a former **Papal Nuncio** to Germany, was elected Pope Pius XII in 1939, he was reluctant to speak out publicly against the Nazi regime or the atrocities that he knew were happening in Germany.



The German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) in 1939



RELIGION IN NAZI GERMANY

- ◆ The Nazis signed a concordat with the Vatican in 1933. This agreement stated that the Roman Catholic Church was to refrain from political activity, and that the rights of the Church in Germany were to be protected.
- ◆ By 1937 the Nazis had broken the main provisions of the concordat. Pope Pius XI criticised the Nazi state in an encyclical.
- ◆ The Nazis found it easier to control the Protestant churches in Germany.
- ◆ Protestant clergy who opposed the Nazis' attempts to control the churches formed the Confessional Church, and many were arrested and imprisoned.

- 1 Define the following terms.
 - i *Volksgemeinschaft*
 - ii *Bund Deutscher Mädel*
 - iii Evangelical Reich Church
 - iv *Hitler Jugend*
 - v eugenics
 - vi concordat
- 2 How does the painting on the right reinforce the idealised image the Nazis had of German family life?
- 3 Use the source below and your own knowledge to explain how Nazi policies affected the lives of women in Germany between 1933 and 1939.

Year	Marriages (per 1000 inhabitants)	Births (per 1000 inhabitants)
1933	9.7	14.7
1934	11.1	18
1935	9.7	19
1936	9.1	20.3
1937	9.1	19.6
1938	9.4	20.3

- 4 Why do you think there was an increase in the number of marriages in 1934?
- 5 Give some reasons why the birth rate increased from 1934.
- 6 Explain why the Nazis tried to limit the influence of the Catholic and Protestant churches. Outline some of the ways they tried to do this.



'Family Portrait', a painting from the Nazi era by Wolf Willrich

8.3

CULTURAL LIFE IN NAZI GERMANY

The free and tolerant environment of the Weimar Republic had given rise to a flourishing and creative cultural life. Hitler and the Nazi leadership despised intellectuals and the cultural activities of the 1920s. 'Whenever I hear the word culture,' said Hermann Göring, 'I reach for my revolver.'¹⁹ 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. The Propaganda Minister, Dr Joseph 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 maintained close control over what could be published and read in the Third Reich. In May 1933 students and young people across Germany staged massive burnings of books that were regarded as 'un-German'. These included books by 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.

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.²⁰



Banned books

Burning un-German books, May 1933

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 they tossed upon the logs the



imagefolk/world history archive

Books deemed unacceptable by the Nazi regime were burnt in May 1933 by students and members of the SA.



Book burning

stumps of lighted torches they had been carrying, until from end to end the mass was aflame ... Then the students' president 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.

New York Times, 11 May 1933

Where books are burnt there one day they burn people.

German poet Heinrich Heine (1797–1856)



This memorial in Berlin today marks the spot in the Bebelplatz where the books were burned in May 1933. The memorial takes the form of an illuminated empty library below the ground.

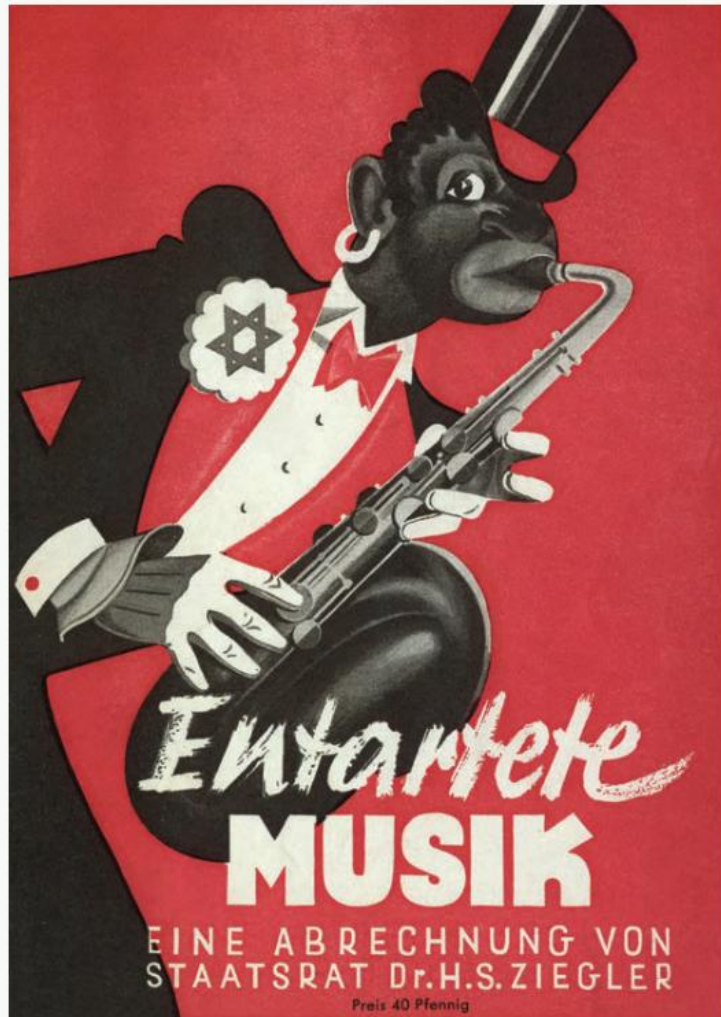
Music

Music was also an area of special interest for the Reich Chamber of Culture. Classical music prevailed, and German composers such as Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss and Ludwig van Beethoven were favoured. Opera and music by non-Germans were tolerated, provided it was acceptable. Mozart's operas *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* and *Così fan Tutti* were discouraged because the librettos (words) had been written by a Jew. Jewish musicians and conductors were dismissed and a significant number of world-famous German musicians, such as Kurt Weill, Arnold Schönberg and Otto Klemperer and the opera singer Richard Tauber, 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, and jazz, because of its black American origins.



Degenerate music



A poster for the Exhibition of Degenerate Music, which opened in Düsseldorf in May 1938

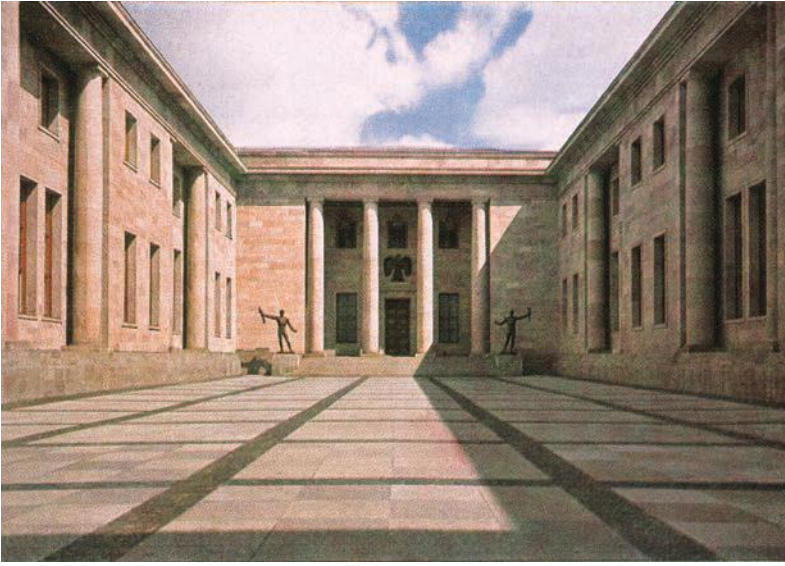
QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the purpose of events like the Exhibition of Degenerate Music?
- 2 Explain the images and meaning of this poster for the 1938 Exhibition of Degenerate Music.
- 3 Research one of the famous composers and musicians whose work was classified as 'degenerate'. Why did the Nazis object to their work?

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 conception of architecture and design prevailed. The innovative and original 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 scales. Constructing buildings and monuments





The entry courtyard of the new Reich Chancellery in Berlin, designed by the architect Albert Speer and finished in 1939, was an example of the monumental style of architecture favoured by the Nazis.

like the new Reich Chancellery in Berlin, the complex of buildings at Nuremberg for the annual party rally, and the House of German Art in Munich was important for the Nazi regime, because it suggested strength and permanence. Architecture was therefore symbolic of the new order and was a deliberate form of cultural expression, as the buildings were to be the stage for the celebration of the Nazi movement. The monumental solid style gave the impression of a brutal, menacing heaviness, and was intended to reinforce the power and permanency of the state.

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 the expressionist school of

painting, which had flourished in Weimar Germany. This type of modern art, where the artist sought to convey feelings and emotions, was seen as depraved. Hitler had a simplistic view of art. It had to be understood by the people. 'Works of art that cannot be understood,' he said, 'will no longer reach the German nation.' The style approved by the state centred on themes linked to nature, the family, comradeship, heroic struggle and the Fatherland. Art was seen as a way of expressing the National Socialist ideology and the concept of the *Volk* or folk community.



Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/Hugo Jaeger

Hitler and his Propaganda Minister, Joseph Goebbels (far left), at the opening of the House of German Art. The Nazi regime imposed strict controls on artistic expression.

THE KAHLENBERG FARMING FAMILY



Alamy Stock Photo/INTERFOTO

SOURCE STUDY

Kahlenberger Bauernfamilie (Kahlenberg Farming Family), oil on canvas by Adolf Wissel, 1939

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why would the Nazis have approved of this artwork? In your answer, consider the style of art and Nazi views about family, children and the role of women.
- 2 How does this style of art differ from the modernist style of art that characterised the Weimar era (see page 87)?

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.

Paintings unacceptable to the regime were burnt, and in 1937 Goebbels approved a special Exhibition of Degenerate Art for the purpose of mocking modern art. The exhibition, in fact, proved so popular that Goebbels had it shut down. The massive House of German Art, which opened in Munich, housed exhibitions of officially approved German art. At the opening of the gallery Hitler said, 'National Socialism has set out to purge the German Reich and our people of all those influences threatening its existence and character. With the opening of this exhibition has come the end of artistic lunacy and with it the artistic pollution of our people.'²¹



Degenerate art



The Sword Bearer by the sculptor Arno Breker, one of two giant bronze statues that stood outside the entrance to Hitler's Chancellery in Berlin. It survived the war and is now on permanent display in the Berlin Historical Museum.

8.3 SUMMARY

CREATING A NEW GERMAN CULTURE

- ◆ The Nazis saw their coming to power after 1933 as the start of a revolution that would change German society.
- ◆ The Nazis had nothing but contempt for the brilliant creative culture of the Weimar era that had set Berlin apart as a creative centre of the world.
- ◆ After 1933 there was a return to more traditional cultural forms.
- ◆ Literature, music and art were all controlled to fit in with the new cultural life of the nation.

8.3 QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why the Nazis wanted to control German cultural life after 1933 and why they were able to succeed in many of these controls.
- 2 Select one of the following forms of artistic and creative expression and explain how the Nazi regime influenced the direction of this form.

A music	D sculpture
B literature	E film
C painting	

ECONOMIC LIFE IN NAZI GERMANY

The Nazis had always been vague about their economic policies, and when they came to power in 1933 they had no detailed program for dealing with the economic problems that confronted the nation. They had been prepared to take full advantage of the economic distress during the Depression in order to win popular support, but they came to power with so few plans that Hitler forbade discussion of economic matters in the party.

The socialism of National Socialism

In the original Nazi Party program, the so-called 25 Points of 1920, the economic aims of the movement were defined: 'We demand therefore the abolition of income unearned by work ... we demand that profits from wholesale trade shall be shared ... we demand the nationalisation of all businesses.'²²

The Nazis were never bound by ideology, and in the years of struggle to 1933 the party focused more on what it was against than what it was for. Hitler, who had no interest in economics, never placed any importance on these socialist aims of the early days, and after the party came to power they were ignored. The left wing of the party, which still held such ideas, lost influence after 1933, and the leaders who had embraced these ideas, such as Gregor Strasser and Ernst Röhm, were dead by 1934.

Hitler was no socialist. He did not believe in state ownership or in the redistribution of wealth. His idea of socialism was that every individual and group in the state should unhesitatingly work for national policy, and that all racially pure Germans, regardless of class, were part of the national community.²³ While he was determined to improve the living standards of the German people, he was also prepared to allow capitalism and big business to function in the new Germany. They had helped the Nazis to power and now they were needed for the restoration of Germany's economic growth. Political power and control over the state was all that mattered. The Nazis intended to control the economy by controlling the state.

Unemployment falls

When the Nazis came to power there were 6 million Germans unemployed – about one-third of the workforce. The regime regarded unemployment as the most urgent immediate issue, and applied the full power of the state to remedy the problem. Within a year that figure had dropped to 4 million, and by 1939 there was a labour shortage.

Unemployment fell for a number of reasons, including a program of public works that had been planned by the Weimar governments – in particular, the elaborate plan to construct more than 3000 kilometres of four-lane autobahns (highways) linking the country from east to west. When Hitler came to power he was a keen supporter of the project, which was expanded and put into effect with an additional outlay of 1 billion reichsmarks. The fact that these roads would have significant military advantages was a major part of the thinking – it was estimated that the roads would mean up to 300 000 soldiers could be moved from one side of the nation to the other in just two days.

In March 1934 Hitler turned the first sod to begin the autobahn building, which was put forward as an example of National Socialism in action, a symbol of the rebuilding of the national community. Historian Adam Tooze in his award-winning study of the German economy, *The Wages of Destruction* (2006), argued that the autobahn projects were never originally conceived as a way of reducing unemployment, and 'that they did not contribute materially to the relief of

HITLER'S CONCEPTION OF SOCIALISM

Each activity and each need of the individual will be regulated by the party as the representative of the general good. Let them own land and factories as much as they please. The decisive factor is that the state, through the party, is supreme over them regardless of whether they are owners or workers ... our socialism goes far deeper ... it establishes the relationship of the individual to the state, the national community ... why need we trouble to socialize banks and factories? We socialize human beings!

Hermann Rauschning, *Hitler Speaks*, Butterworth, London, 1939, pp. 190–92.

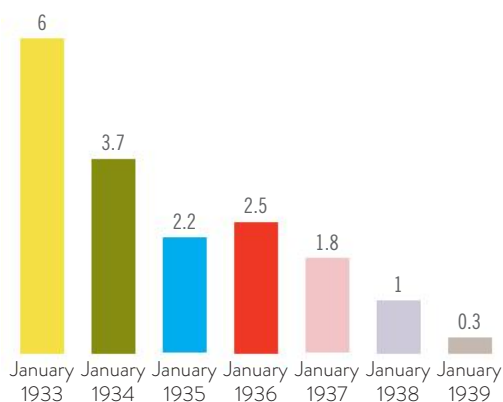
QUESTIONS

- 1 Is there any evidence here that the Nazis sought to nationalise (take over) private business?
- 2 Explain how Hitler's concept of socialism fits in with the Nazi idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

unemployment.²⁴ Unemployment in fact was already on the fall, and this decline was also attributed to Nazi social policy, which saw more women forced to leave the workforce. As new laws restricted the rights of women in the workforce, more than 800 000 left the labour market between 1933 and 1935. By September 1933 unemployment had fallen to below 4 million.

By 1932 the worst of the Depression had passed, and the government provided loans and tax concessions to business to re-equip plant and to employ more workers. Another initiative that reduced unemployment was the creation of the Reich Labour Service (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*) in 1935. All males aged 18 to 25 were required to do six months of labour service. In the same year, conscription for the armed forces was introduced, and this brought the unemployment figure down further.

Unemployment (millions)



Unemployment in Germany, 1933–1939



imagefolk/Berliner Verlag/Archiv/dpa-Zentralbild

The *Reichsarbeitsdienst*, or RAD (Reich Labour Service), was a quasi-military institution established by the Nazis to reduce unemployment.

The economic recovery

Of all the modern industrial nations stricken by the Great Depression, Germany was the only nation in the 1930s to completely recover from its effects. Germany made an impressive economic recovery in the years after 1933. This was in part due to the nature of the totalitarian regime, which could impose economic policy and controls regardless of popular opinion, and in part due to the



The Nazi economy

great potential strength of German industry. The amount of public money spent on construction, transportation and particularly rearmament were also factors in the recovery. Expenditure of construction rose from 0.9 billion reichsmarks in 1932 to almost 5.5 million in 1936. Rearmament spending moved off a base of 0.7 billion reichsmarks in 1932 to more than 10 billion by 1936. In the same time, unemployment dropped from 6 million in 1932 to 1.5 million by mid-1936. Germany had been the strongest economic power on the continent before World War I, and before World War II it was rapidly reclaiming this position.

The work of Hjalmar Schacht

In 1934 Hitler appointed Dr Hjalmar Schacht as Minister for Economics. Schacht, who was also president of the Reichsbank, had helped Stresemann deal with the hyperinflation of 1923. Now his financial skills were put to work to manage Germany's economic recovery.

Schacht's ability as a financial manager gave business and industry leaders confidence. This confidence grew as the Nazis smashed the trade unions and imposed wage restraints on German workers. The left wing of the Nazi Party, which had taken seriously the idea of socialism and nationalisation, had been silenced. Schacht also took measures to strengthen Germany's trade position. There were strict controls over what Germany could import, with priority given to essential commodities such as iron ore. A system of trade treaties was signed with countries that were economically weaker than Germany, mainly in Latin America and eastern Europe. Under these arrangements, which were a system of barter, Germany acquired the raw materials it wanted and paid for them by allowing the other country to take German exports.

The Four-Year Plan, 1936

By 1936 the German economy was firmly on the path to recovery and the Nazi Party was secure in power. From 1936 the emphasis on domestic issues began to change to a focus on the wider issue of Germany's place in Europe, and the foreign policy Hitler intended to follow. In August 1936 Hitler dictated a secret memorandum on the state of the German economy and the need for Germany to increase the pace of rearmament. 'There is only one interest,' Hitler wrote, 'the interest of the nation, only one view, the bringing of Germany to the point of political and economic self sufficiency ... I therefore set the following tasks. German armed forces must be operational within four years. The German economy must be fit for war within four years.'²⁵ In September 1936 at the annual party rally in Nuremberg, Hitler announced the Four-Year Plan and placed Hermann Göring in charge.

A key part of the plan was to achieve **autarky** or economic self-sufficiency in food and raw materials. The memory of the blockade imposed on Germany in World War I was still fresh, and the aim was to make Germany self-sufficient and to reduce its dependence on overseas trade. Work began on the production of synthetic rubber and textiles and the development of better oil and petroleum supplies, and the iron and steel industry was expanded. The government intervened with the construction of the giant Hermann Göring Steelworks in 1937. By 1940 the steelworks was the largest industrial complex in the world, and employed more than 600 000 people.

Schacht, who had managed the economy with great care, clashed with Göring over the cost and pace of rearmament. Hitler believed that Schacht had become too cautious, and in November 1937 Schacht resigned. Between 1936 and 1939, 65 per cent of all German industrial investment went to war-related projects, and by 1939, 55 per cent of all government spending was on the military forces of the Reich.²⁶

The removal of Schacht was clear evidence to the leaders of German industry that the aims of the party were all that mattered. 'The nation does not live for the economy,' said Hitler. 'The economy, economic leaders and theories allow unqualified service to this struggle for the self assertion of our nation.'²⁷



Hitler's Autarky Memorandum

How were workers treated in Nazi Germany?

Most of the German working class had displayed loyalty to the parties of the left, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Communist Party (KPD). One of the Nazis' first acts after they came to power was to break the power of the trade unions and organised labour. As part of the process of *Gleichschaltung*, the German trade unions had been abolished in May 1933, their assets seized and their leaders imprisoned. A new organisation, the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*), was set up to manage the working class.

Although the Nazis controlled the working class, restricted their wages, increased working hours, and removed their ability to strike, the fact remained that the economic policies of the regime could not be carried out without them. The government sought to restrict wage increases, and for most of the 1930s the wages of German workers did not increase. In 1936 the average wage for a factory worker was 35 marks per week, well below the wage level of the 1920s. However, the time set aside for work did increase, and by 1939 the average German worker faced a 49-hour week. Workers were also required to pay sickness and accident insurance, as well as their compulsory membership dues to the German Labour Front. 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. Only then was there some improvement in wages. The standard of living for the 15 million German workers slowly improved between 1933 and 1939, but it was not a dramatic improvement. What was dramatic was the increase in German industrial production. By 1936 it had increased by almost 60 per cent on the 1933 figure.

The main role of the German Labour Front, which had become the largest organisation in the Reich, was to educate and indoctrinate the workers to accept their role in the new Germany. The Nazis sought to eliminate class barriers and to bring the workers in as part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. A number of schemes came into operation to win the loyalty and goodwill of the workers.

The Beauty of Labour (*Schönheit der Arbeit*)

In November 1933 the Bureau of the Beauty of Labour (*Schönheit der Arbeit*) was set up with the aim of improving physical working conditions. In thousands of factories and offices across the country, conditions for many workers began to improve. Washrooms were built, new canteens were opened to provide hot meals, workplaces were given better ventilation and light, lawns and

gardens replaced asphalt, and in many factories recreation facilities were constructed. Beauty of Labour sought to provide a better working environment as compensation for the fact that throughout the Nazi period workers had enjoyed only the smallest wage increase. There was also another motive for the scheme. Rationalisation and efficiency studies had shown that better working conditions increased productivity.

Strength Through Joy

More significant than the Beauty of Labour was the Strength Through Joy movement (*Kraft durch Freude*, or KdF). Robert Ley, the Head of the Labour Front, calculated that the average German worker had 3740 hours of leisure a year. The Nazis believed that this time had to be used, and that if workers participated in organised leisure activities



The Strength Through Joy movement offered German workers cheap holiday cruises. This photo shows passengers on the outside deck of the 'Strength Through Joy' cruise ship *Robert Ley* during a voyage to Norway in May 1939.

they would return with greater motivation to their daily work. Using money confiscated from the trade unions, the KdF was set up to provide leisure activities for 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 and German tourism began to grow. The KdF purchased four ocean liners 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.



Strength Through Joy

Towards the Sun – German Workers Travel to Madeira (1936)

When the news reached the individuals that they, yes they, were to travel to Madeira, they stood there stunned with joy. Here was the old miner who had been going down the mine for forty years ... tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks ...

At the St Pauli piers are three mighty ships: *St Louis*, *The German* and *Ozeana* and further away the *Sierra Cordoba*. That is the Strength Through Joy fleet that is sailing today for Madeira with 4000 German workers on board ... Today is a day of rejoicing for German workers. Today something that four years ago would still have been ridiculed has again become a reality. Today the German worker travels out into the world as the representative of the nation! 'Germany is sailing with you' banners proclaim that are spread out on the shore. The farewell that Hamburg gives these Strength Through Joy holiday-makers is truly uplifting. Thousands of people line the shoreline ... White shine the banners and blood-red the flags of the Third Reich.

RF Holt and A Pickard, *Democracy Dictatorship Destruction. Documents of Modern German History 1918–1945*, Longman Cheshire, 1991, p. 236.

The Volkswagen

In their quest to win the loyalty of the working class, the German Labour Front financed the development of the Strength Through Joy car. Its name was 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, where class barriers came down. Designed by Ferdinand Porsche, the People's Car was to be a car every German family could afford. Hitler, who had a great interest in cars, favoured the project. Germans were encouraged to contribute 5 marks per week and when the purchase price of 750 marks had been paid, the buyer would receive an order number entitling them to a car as it was produced. More than 330 000 workers applied to buy a Volkswagen car, but very few ever received them. The first cars were produced in 1938 but the outbreak of the war the following year stopped production. As for the 'pay in advance' funds, there was no refund and the money was directed to the war effort.



Alamy Stock Photo/CBW

The KdF Wagen (the Strength Through Joy Car), later known as the Volkswagen

German agriculture and the farmers

The Nazis placed great importance on the revival of German agriculture. Nazi ideology had a special place for the farming class, which in 1933 made up 30 per cent of the German population. Farmers were seen as the noblest class in the nation, because the Nazis believed they were the most racially pure. Away from the corruption and influence of the great urban centres, they had maintained true Nordic racial purity. The Nazis embraced the idea of blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*), the idea that the preservation of the German farming class was an essential element in the preservation of the racial community.

Conditions on the land were hard during the 1920s, and most small farmers experienced falling incomes and increasing debt. In 1933 the government introduced the *Hereditary Farm Law*. This defined farm lots of up to 125 hectares as 'hereditary farms'. Under the law these farms could not be sold or broken up, and had to be passed on to descendants. In the same month, the Reich Food Estate came into being to establish control over the production, distribution and price of food. This huge bureaucracy, which came to employ more than 70 000 people, set food-production quotas and fixed prices. The government provided financial benefits to farmers and small businesses. Partly as a result, farm incomes began to rise in the early 1930s, as did the price of German agrarian products.

The Nazis also sought to increase the dignity of agrarian life through a series of special festivals and rituals that focused on the joys of rural life. The term 'peasant' (*Bauer*) was now declared an honourable title, and as a class, rural workers were projected as a core element of the *Volksgemeinschaft* or national community. Every year in October the German farm workers met their Führer in a celebration staged by the Propaganda Ministry to celebrate the autumn harvest.

THE GERMAN ECONOMY

- ◆ The Nazis did not have detailed economic plans to deal with the Depression when they came to power in 1933. Priority was given to reducing unemployment.
- ◆ There was little attempt to restrict business and capitalist activity as long as industry leaders accepted the authority of the state.
- ◆ There was significant spending by the state on public works projects.
- ◆ Hjalmar Schacht carried through some important reforms that revitalised the German economy.
- ◆ Workers did not enjoy any real improvement in wages or hours of work.
- ◆ The government sought to win the support of the workers through movements such as the Strength Through Joy organisation.
- ◆ The government sought to improve conditions for the farmers, who were seen as a special group in German society.
- ◆ The Four-Year Plan from 1936 was the start of moves to prepare the German economy for war.

- 1 Match each term in Group A with its correct description in Group B.

GROUP A

KdF Wagen

Robert Ley

Reich Labour Service

Dr Hjalmar Schacht

autarky

Strength Through Joy

GROUP B

economic self-sufficiency

Minister for Economics 1934–1937

An organisation for German workers

Head of the German Labour Front

Volkswagen

A compulsory service for young German males

- 2 'In the twelve years of his rule in Germany, Hitler produced the biggest confusion in government that has ever existed in a civilised state ... he removed from the organisation of the state all the clarity of leadership. It was not all laziness ... It was intentional. With this technique he systematically disorganised the upper levels of the Reich leadership in order to develop and further the authority of his own will until it become a despotic tyranny.'

Otto Dietrich, *Zwölf Jahre mit Hitler (Twelve Years with Hitler)*, Isar, Cologne, 1955. Otto Dietrich was Hitler's Chief Press Officer.

To what extent do you agree with this assessment?

- 3 Create a mind map about the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Make sure you include things like a definition, its purpose, associated programs and policies, and the ways that different groups were affected.
- 4 Empathy task: You are a teenager living in Germany in 1937. Write a letter to your English pen pal. In your letter, describe what you have observed/experienced in the last couple of months.
- 5 Outline some of the measures undertaken in Germany after 1933 that helped reduce unemployment.
- 6 Explain the purpose of the Strength Through Joy movement (KdF) and Beauty of Labour programs. Which groups in society would have benefited most from the programs?
- 7 Research: In July 1935 the Reich Labour Service Act was passed, which forced every man aged between 18 and 25 to spend six months in the National Labour Service. Prepare an extended response on the Reich Labour Service that covers the following areas.
- i What did the men do?
 - ii How and where did they live?
 - iii Were they paid?
 - iv Did the Reich Labour Service have any military connection?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTION

- 1 'The Nazis transformed German social and cultural life between 1933 and 1939.' To what extent is this statement accurate?

Endnotes

- 1 *Völkischer Beobachter*, May 1936.
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- 4 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1896–1936: Hubris*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 1998, p. xxvi.
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- 6 Otto Wagener, *Hitler Memoirs of a Confidant*, edited by Henry Ashby Turner, translated by Ruth Hein, Yale University Press, 1985, p. 266.
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- 9 Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, vol. I, Andre Deutsch, London, 1974, p. 11.
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- 11 Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, Edward Arnold, London, 1989, p. 66.
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- 13 K Epstein, 'The Nazi Consolidation of Power', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 34, 1962.
- 14 Richard J Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, Penguin Books, London, 2006, p. 503.
- 15 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 363.
- 16 Bernhard Rust, quoted in *The Times*, 29 January 1935.
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- 18 Quoted in William Shirer, *The Nightmare Years 1930–1940*, Bantam Books, New York, 1985, p. 152.
- 19 Matthew Hughes and Chris Mann, *Inside Hitler's Germany*, Brown Partworks, London, 2000, p. 86.
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- 21 Quoted in William Shirer, *The Nightmare Years 1930–1940*, Bantam Books, New York, 1985, pp. 133–34.
- 22 Norman H Baynes (ed.), *The Speeches of Adolf Hitler*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, 1942, pp. 102–107.
- 23 Paul Johnson, *Modern Times*, Harper Collins, New York, 1992, p. 293.
- 24 Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, Penguin. 2007, p. 45.
- 25 David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, Penguin Books, London, 1966, p. 727.
- 26 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, p. 283.
- 27 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, p. 283.

Persuasion and pressure

9.1

THE ROLE OF PROPAGANDA IN
THE THIRD REICH

9.2

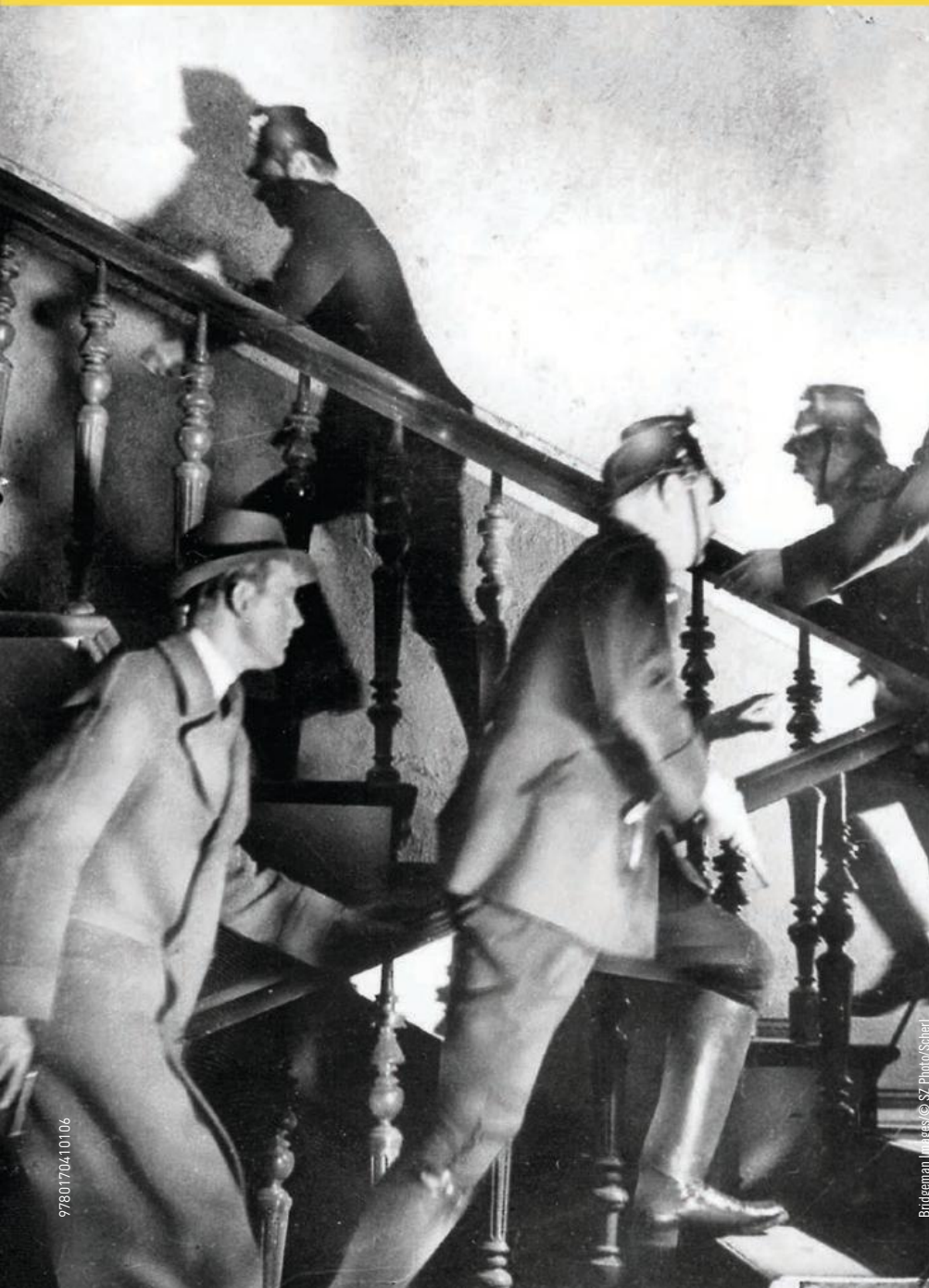
TERROR AND REPRESSION

9.3

THE NAZI STATE AND
THE ARMED FORCES

9.4

OPPOSITION TO HITLER



German police and Gestapo
members rush to arrest
political opponents.

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

block wardens

Police informers. These were individuals – many were local party officials – in apartment blocks in cities and towns who reported fellow citizens for suspicious behaviour.

extermination camps

Special camps set up with facilities for the mass murder of people, usually by poisonous gas.

Gestapo

In German, the Geheime Staatspolizei, the secret state police in Nazi Germany.

Jehovah's Witnesses

A religious group who were singled out for persecution in Nazi Germany because of their refusal to accept the authority of the state or any other worldly power.

Panzer

The German word for armour and often used to describe armoured fighting vehicles (tanks). A Panzer corps was a unit of motorised armoured tanks.

rearmament

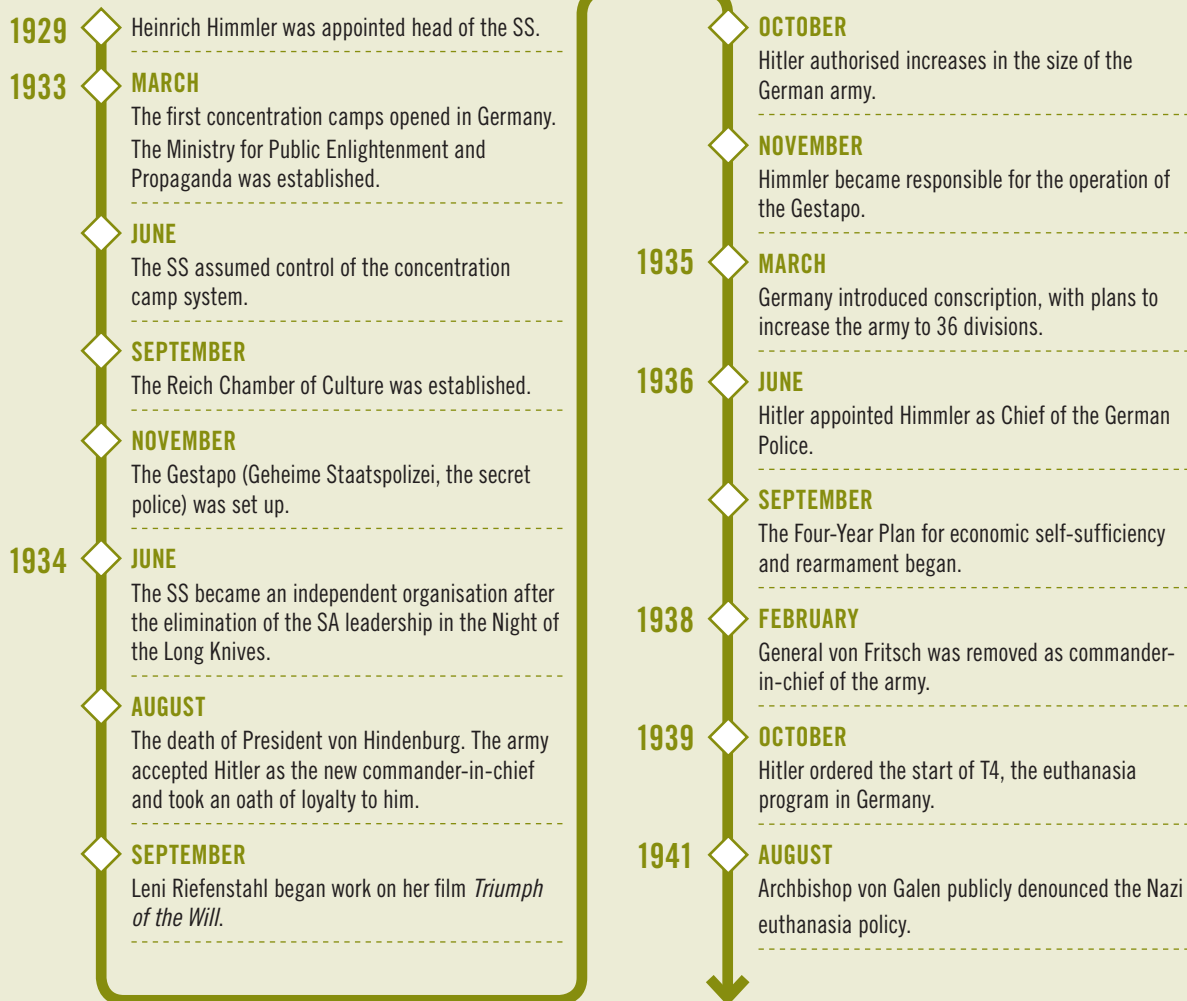
To rebuild or re-equip the military forces of a country.

Sinti/Romani peoples

A nomadic people, originally of Hindu origin from north-west India, who moved into most parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, commonly referred to as Gypsies in English. The Nazis sought to eliminate them from the areas of Europe that were under their control.

TIMELINE

Persuasion and pressure



9.1

THE ROLE OF PROPAGANDA IN THE THIRD REICH

In March 1933, a few weeks after he came to power, Hitler approved the establishment of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. From the earliest days of the Nazi movement propaganda had played a major role in the quest for power. Now that they had come to power the Nazis wanted to win the support and approval of the German people, and propaganda was an essential element to achieve this. If persuasion failed, pressure was always the alternative. For those who actively opposed the regime and all its influences, the Nazis resorted to terror.

The Propaganda Ministry was led by Dr Joseph Goebbels, the most intellectual of the top Nazi leadership. He was elegant, charming and ruthless, and although he was just 35 years old when Hitler made him Propaganda Minister, he understood the value of propaganda and the psychology behind its effective use.



Joseph Goebbels

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.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 334.

SOURCE STUDY

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 the totalitarian state, propaganda controlled all communication and expression and defined 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 its 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. He used the latest technology 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.



Getty Images/Hulton Archive

Dr Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945), Reich Minister for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, broadcasting on German radio. He controlled propaganda, which included promoting the image of Hitler as the heroic leader of the German people.

The Propaganda Ministry, situated in Berlin opposite Hitler's Chancellery, developed into a huge organisation. It controlled the German newspapers, radio and film. 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 special ceremonies associated with the Nazi movement. Goebbels was absolutely central to the propaganda machine. As Minister he controlled the Propaganda Ministry, and he was also President of the Reich Chamber of Culture and Director of the Nazi Party propaganda office.



Nazi propaganda

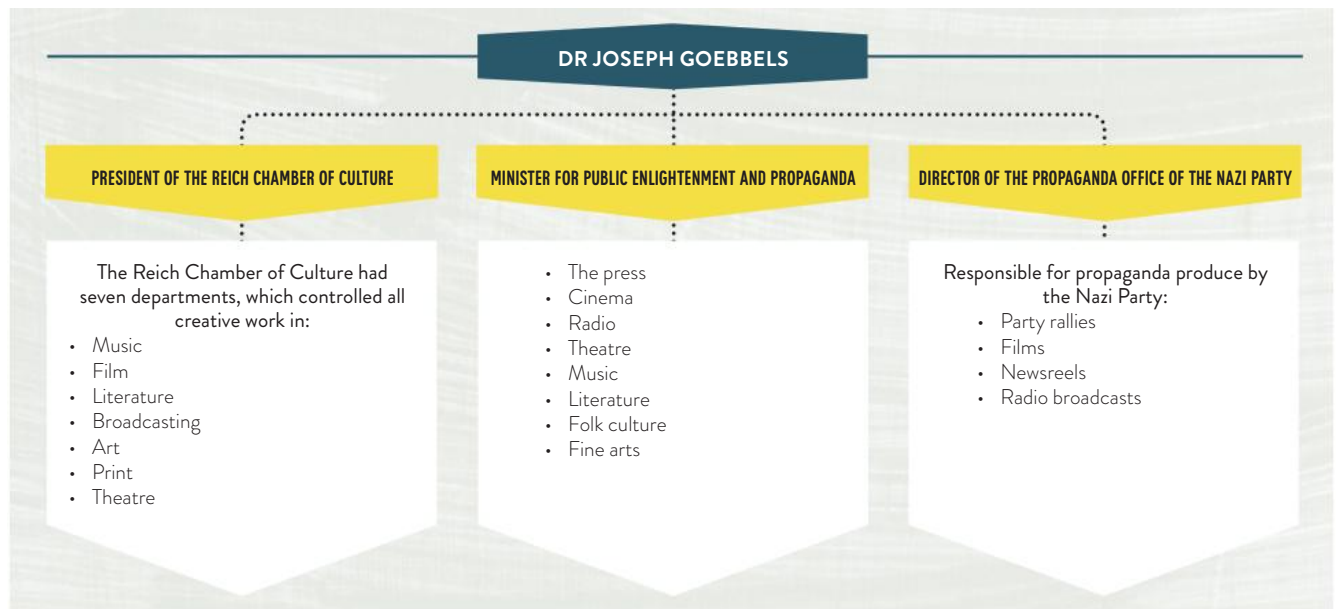
The press

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 print media in Germany had to be registered and were required to be 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* or DNB), which was part of the Propaganda Ministry. The DNB issued the stories the newspapers could print. Newspapers that displeased the government were simply closed down.

The radio

Goebbels understood the enormous influence of broadcasting, and the radio became one of the most important media for propaganda. To ensure that all Germans had a radio set, the state produced the People's Radio (*Volksempfänger*), which was cheap, effective and very affordable. 'With this

instrument,' Goebbels observed, 'you make public opinion.'¹ Goebbels was intelligent enough to realise that too much direct propaganda had a negative effect, and that the best results were achieved by indirect methods such as inserting subtle messages into radio broadcasts and in programs of popular music and entertainment.



The power of propaganda in Nazi Germany

RADIO AND THE THIRD REICH

SOURCE A



A poster promoting the People's Radio (Volksempfänger). The caption reads, 'All of Germany listens to the Führer'.

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 John Laver, *Nazi Germany 1933–1945*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1991, p. 25.

SOURCE C: Radio announcement about Hitler on the radio

Attention! On Wednesday 21 March the Führer is speaking on all German radio stations from 11.00 a.m. to 11.50 a.m. The district party headquarters has ordered that all factory owners, department stores, offices, shops, inns and blocks of flats put up loudspeakers an hour before the broadcast of the Führer's speech so that the whole work force and all national comrades can participate fully in the broadcast.

Völkischer Beobachter, 16 March 1934.

QUESTION

- 1 Why was radio so important to Nazi propaganda? In your answer, refer to at least two of the above sources and your own knowledge.

Home ownership of radios in Germany increased dramatically, from 1 million in 1933 to more than 9 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.

The cinema

Joseph Goebbels not only had a particular love of films, but he also understood their power to influence the people, and thus their value as propaganda instruments. 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. The *Reich Motion Picture Law* required that 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. The Nazis interfered less with the German film industry than with other media, such as radio and the press. In the 1930s the film industry, despite these controls, was very productive, with state-of-the-art facilities at the huge movie 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 understood 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, such as 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 film appearances carefully stage-managed and edited to project the image of Hitler as the man apart who had sacrificed himself for the good of the nation. These films concentrated on emotion rather than facts, and were an essential element in the creation of the Hitler myth.

Anti-Semitic propaganda

The Propaganda Ministry also produced a constant flow of anti-Semitic material, and the Jews became a target for venting national frustrations. 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. *Jud Süß* (1938), set in the eighteenth century, told the story of the Jewish villain Süß, who, after seducing a German maiden and torturing her fiancé, is finally hung by outraged German townsfolk.

A later 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 obscene.

The Eternal Jew

Commentary from the film *The Eternal Jew* (1940)

'Comparable with the Jewish wanderings through history are the mass migration of an equally restless animal, the rat. Where ever rats appear they bring ruin, they ravage human property and foodstuffs. In this way they spread disease, plague, leprosy, typhoid, cholera, dysentery etc. They are cunning, cowardly, and cruel and are found mostly in pacts. In the animal world they represent the element of craftiness and subterranean destruction — no different from the Jews among mankind.'



A poster for the propaganda film *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*)

Propaganda and German culture

The control of film was one example of the Nazis' determination to control and influence German cultural life, which Goebbels believed was one of his duties. He set out to achieve this through the Reich Chamber of Culture, part of his Propaganda Ministry. Before the Nazis came to power, modernism, a development from the period before World War I, was the dominant influence in German art, music and literature.

All of this changed under the Nazis. Modern art, including expressionism and cubism, was dismissed as 'degenerate'. Art under the Third Reich had to be realistic and embrace images of everyday Aryan life and idealised womanhood, landscapes and rural scenes. Nudes were accepted because they glorified strength and the Aryan form. As a propaganda exercise, in 1937 Goebbels organised the Exhibition of Great German Art, held in the newly constructed House of German Art in Munich. More than 6000 works of art approved by the Nazis went on display, reflecting not only what was now acceptable, but also images that reinforced the Nazi ideal of the *Volkgemeinschaft*, or People's Community.

Literature was also controlled. The Nazis removed books that were deemed 'un-German', and the Reich Chamber of Literature controlled all authors and new publications. Not surprisingly, many authors left Germany rather than face such controls over their creative work.

While the Weimar era had seen the growth of innovative and experimental music, the Reich Chamber of Music now imposed strict controls. As in art, modernism was out, as was jazz and any music by Jewish composers. German composers were acceptable, and there was a particular focus on those whose music inspired nationalist emotions, or the works of composers like Wagner, whose works reflected heroic themes.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

The Orchestra of the Bavarian State Opera performing a lunchtime concert of acceptable Germanic music for workers in 1937

Daily life in Germany was changed by a new calendar of annual events for special celebration by the German people. Highlights of each year included the Führer's birthday in April, Mothering Day (the second Sunday of May), which honoured all German mothers, and the annual celebration of the Nazi Party at their party rally, held every September in the city of Nuremberg.

Date	Celebration
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 set aside to remember the war dead
20 April	The Führer's birthday
1 May	National Labour Day Mothering Day (second Sunday of May)
21 June	Celebration of the Summer Solstice
September	The Nuremberg Party Rally, a three- to five-day celebration of the Nazi Party
October	Autumn Harvest Thanksgiving, a day to pay tribute to the German farmer
9 November	Anniversary of the 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch
21 December	Celebration of the Winter Solstice (which was intended to replace Christmas)

Days of celebration in the calendar of the Third Reich



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

One important date in the Nazi calendar was the anniversary of the 1923 Munich Putsch. What had been a failure in 1923 was now celebrated as a victory, as well as an occasion for German soldiers to take a personal oath of loyalty to Hitler.

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 'National Day of the Party' (*Reichsparteitag*), 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.



Getty Images/Bettmann

Hitler Youth Day at the Nuremberg Party Rally in 1934

Leni Riefenstahl: filmmaker



Leni Riefenstahl

One woman who challenged the Nazi ideal of women as obedient wives and devoted mothers was the filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl. Not only did she define her own professional life, she achieved a turbulent career, including a time when she was one of the most prominent women of Hitler's Germany.

Helene (Leni) Bertha Amalie Riefenstahl, born in 1902, began her career as a professional dancer in 1921, before moving on to establish her reputation as an actor. Leni spent a great deal of time behind the camera studying the technique of filmmaking, and in 1932 she took on the challenge of producing, directing, editing and starring in her own film, *The Blue Light*. The film was a great success.

That same year she was persuaded by her friends to attend a political rally at the Sportplatz, where Hitler was to give an address. Riefenstahl was fascinated as Hitler 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 did so many others. 'He radiated something very powerful,' she later observed, 'something which had a kind of hypnotic effect. That frightened me a little.'² Shortly after, Riefenstahl met Hitler, who 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 that 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 Dr 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 make a film of the Nuremberg Party Rally. Her new career as filmmaker for the Third Reich had begun.

Triumph of the Will, 1934



Triumph of the Will

In 1933, Riefenstahl produced a short film about the 1933 party rally, entitled *Victory of Faith*. She had little time to prepare for filming, and faced obstruction from party officials, who had difficulty accepting a woman in such a role. The overall film was disappointing, and Riefenstahl herself admitted it was more like a newsreel than the creative work 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 as another newsreel-type film from the Propaganda Ministry. Joseph Goebbels did not want Riefenstahl on the project, given that she would be working outside the control of his all-embracing Propaganda Ministry. He also 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.

Leni 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 was captured on the screen must relate to the story itself. Riefenstahl came to realise the importance of planning every shot, using varied camera angles and appropriate music scores, and of moving the cameras as well as the action. She spent a great deal of time on the editing process, piecing together her film to achieve the desired artistic effects. The editing room, she once said, was her 'magic workshop'.

The 1934 Nuremberg 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 planned every scene with meticulous care, in particular where each of 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, giving an expanding panorama of the scene. Rail tracks were built in parts of the stadium for other 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.

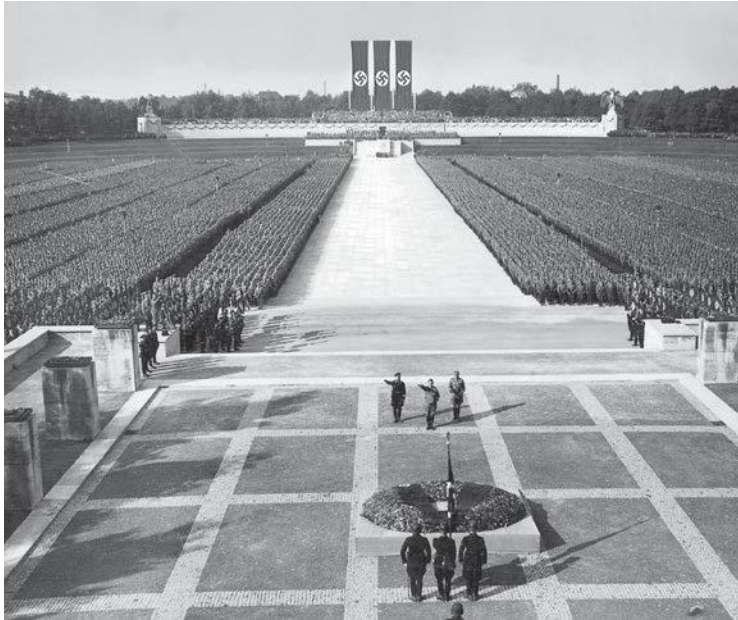


Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Leni Riefenstahl speaking to a young Hitler Youth trumpeter while preparing for a close-up shot during the making of the film *Triumph of the Will*

In seven exhausting days and nights, Riefenstahl and her crew captured more than 100 000 metres of film footage. Afterwards, the equally difficult process of editing began, which took more than five months. Here, the already powerful images of the film were brought together to create a type of film art never seen before. Hitler gave the film its name, *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.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo



A scene from Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, 1934. The trio facing the camera are Heinrich Himmler, Head of the SS (left), Adolf Hitler (centre), and Victor Lutze, Head of the SA (right).



Alamy Stock Photo/Pictorial Press Ltd

A German poster for the release of *Triumph of the Will* in 1935

How effective was Nazi propaganda?

Given the power of the Nazi state, the all-embracing influence of Goebbels and his Propaganda Ministry, and the ruthless consistency of the message, with its appeal to emotions rather than rational thought, it seems logical to assume that Nazi propaganda was successful in influencing the German people. While it is very difficult to measure public opinion under a totalitarian state, more recent historical research has raised doubts about the level of success. The increasingly accepted view is that the success of propaganda varied according to circumstances. In terms of promoting an image of Hitler as a charismatic leader, the propaganda was effective, although the economic recovery and the restoration of stability to German life in the mid-1930s certainly assisted with this. Without these achievements, propaganda alone would not have been able to preserve the positive image of Hitler. The appeal to traditional German values, the idea of the new Germany and aspects of the people's community (the *Volksgemeinschaft*) also had an effect.

Research, based on oral histories, now suggests that Goebbels and his propaganda machine were less effective among working-class Germans and that the anti-Semitic propaganda also missed its mark with the majority of Germans, as did attacks on long-established parts of German society such as the churches. Nazi propaganda was most successful when it played on traditional German prejudices. It did have its limits – as Ian Kershaw has written, ‘even Goebbel’s full bag of tricks could not turn black into white. The success of propaganda depended heavily on the ability to build upon, exploit and “interpret” existing social and political values’³

The Berlin Olympic Games, 1936

The 1936 Olympic Games had been awarded to Germany before the Nazis came to power. Goebbels saw the enormous potential of the event to promote the new Germany, and added a non-sporting spectacle to the Olympic Games that had not existed to that time. A new Olympic stadium was built in the classical style favoured by the Nazis, and events were broadcast to the world in more than 25 different languages. Even the new medium of television, then in its infancy, was used. For the time of the games all anti-Semitic activities stopped, and for those few weeks in the summer of 1936, as the world looked on, Germany was a different place.



Alamy Stock Photo/Keystone Pictures USA

The opening of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games

PROPAGANDA

- ◆ Propaganda in Nazi Germany was the responsibility of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, established in March 1933 under Dr Joseph Goebbels.
- ◆ Goebbels also controlled the Reich Chamber of Culture. Each branch was responsible for a particular aspect of German popular culture and expression, including:
 - ◆ literature
 - ◆ the press
 - ◆ broadcasting
 - ◆ theatre
 - ◆ music
 - ◆ art
 - ◆ film.
- ◆ The major themes constantly addressed by Nazi propaganda were:
 - ◆ the promotion of Hitler and the cult of the leader (*Führerprinzip*)
 - ◆ the appeal of the National Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*)
 - ◆ the achievements of the Reich
 - ◆ the racial state
 - ◆ fear and hatred of the Jews and Bolshevism.

- 1 What did the Nazis see as the purpose of propaganda?
- 2 Which aspects of Nazi propaganda were most successful? Which were least successful? Why?
- 3 Explain why the Nuremberg rallies and the Berlin Olympics can be seen as Nazi propaganda.
- 4 Research: After World War II, Leni Riefenstahl was found to be a Mitlaufer, or 'Fellow Traveller'. What is a Mitlaufer and why was she found to be one?
- 5 Class debate: Should Leni Riefenstahl be considered a Nazi propagandist?
- 6 Create a classroom exhibition of propaganda posters.
 - i Each student collects three Nazi propaganda posters from the 1930s and prints or photocopies them at A4 size.
 - ii Students identify the purpose of each poster, and assess whether it would have been successful with its intended audience.
 - iii Collate all the posters. As a class, decide which are the most effective and display them on the classroom wall.

9.2

TERROR AND REPRESSION

The terror state

The great majority of the German people accepted the Nazi state and the authority of Hitler's leadership. The major aim of Nazi propaganda was to reinforce this acceptance and to maintain it. However, because Nazi Germany was a totalitarian state, 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 and ruthlessly efficient police structure that was used to terrorise the German population. There was no attempt to hide the activities of the security police – terror was more effective if it was seen to be happening. The Schutzstaffel (the SS) and its agencies, which formed the private army and security system of the Nazi Party, became very much a 'state within the state', but one totally loyal to the Nazi movement and its leader. Led by Heinrich Himmler, the *Reichsführer SS*, who commanded the entire organisation, the SS and its associated agencies answered only to Hitler. Himmler became one of the most powerful and feared figures in Germany. He led a massive organisation that was totally independent of the law or any other restraint.

The SS (Schutzstaffel)



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

The organisation expanded rapidly, and by 1933 the black-shirted SS numbered nearly 50 000. By 1935 the SS had increased to 200 000 men. Where the SA had attracted rough street fighters, entry to the SS was strictly controlled. All members of the SS were required to meet high educational and physical standards. They also had to have a pure racial background spanning a number of

generations. Women associated with SS members were also required to come from a racially pure Germanic line.

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. The slogan of the SS was *My Honour is Loyalty* – unconditional obedience to Hitler and to the state. Acting independently of the government and the party, the SS carried out the policies of the Nazi state. In both its structure and influence, it became a state within a state.

The SS 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. Special SS killing squads (the *Einsatzgruppen*) were formed to operate in territories conquered by the German army. These killing squads murdered Jews, communists, intellectuals and anyone who could oppose the regime. 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.

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) was led by Himmler's deputy, Reinhard Heydrich.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Heinrich Himmler, head of the Schutzstaffel (SS) and Chief of the German police



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 organisations, the SS recognised no departures and no separate private sphere. The individual was in for life.

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

SOURCE STUDY

QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the purpose of the initiation ceremony described in the source?
- 2 Why do you think the eyewitness had tears in his eyes?

The *Waffen SS*

The SS always had fully armed units, and when the war began in 1939 the *Waffen SS*, the combat arm of the SS, was established. Initially the *Wehrmacht* (army) leaders resisted the emergence of the *Waffen SS*, having been assured by Hitler after 1934 that the *Wehrmacht* was to be the sole bearer of arms for the nation.

However, as the war expanded in 1942 and 1943 the *Waffen SS* grew rapidly. Many non-Germans (including foreigners from Scandinavia, Holland and other countries) came to serve in the *Waffen SS*, and at its peak it had some 40 divisions and 900 000 men serving. The SS therefore had a role in conducting aggressive war, and although the *Waffen SS* units and their officers were tactically under the command of the *Wehrmacht* while in the field, the *Waffen SS* remained as much a part of the SS as any other branch. The fighting quality of the SS divisions varied, but some of the **Panzer** divisions were deadly and highly effective, and made a formidable contribution to the German war effort.



The *Waffen SS*



Alamy Stock Photo/alg-images

Hitler passes down the ranks of the guard of honour of his personal bodyguard regiment, the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler, in 1935. He is accompanied by *Reichsführer* Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS.

The Gestapo – ‘Terror to Repression’

The secret state police, or *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Gestapo), was established by a decree on 30 November 1933. In November 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. The Gestapo's methods were brutal and it was a key part of the overall terror system that stretched from the streets of Germany to the concentration camps. Propaganda created the image that the Gestapo was able to detect all opposition. Anyone could be summoned to police headquarters, mistreated, and held almost indefinitely before being sent to a concentration camp under protective custody.

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

From 1934 the Gestapo and the SS ran the first concentration camps at Dachau, near Munich, and at Oranienburg, near Berlin. 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'.



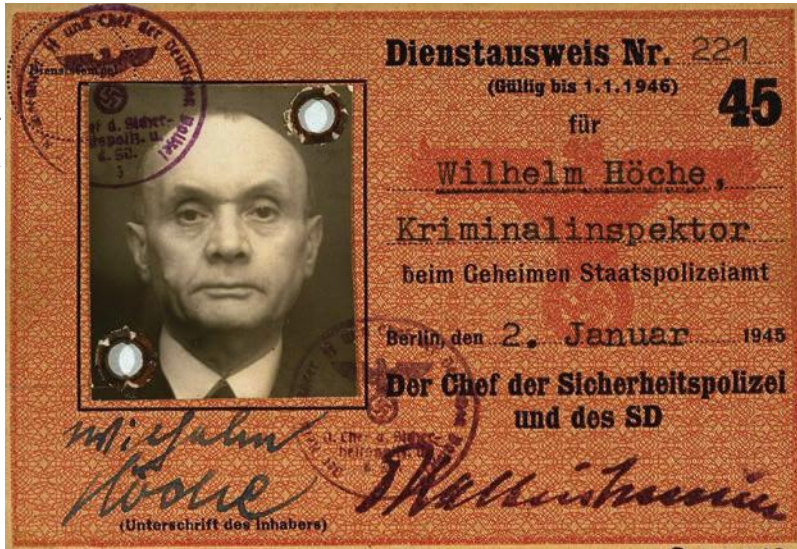
Prinz Albrecht-Strasse 8 in Berlin, the Gestapo headquarters, was the most feared address in Germany. The basement contained a complex network of prison cells and interrogation rooms.

The real Gestapo

As historians have begun to look at the Nazi era from the 'grass roots' level of society, rather than from the 'top down' view of the Nazi leadership, new research has opened up new interpretations. The role of the Gestapo in German society is now under revision. The long-held historical view, which placed the Gestapo as the focal point of a brutal Nazi terror state in which all the German people were under constant surveillance, has now been challenged.

Historical research, particularly the work of Canadian historian Robert Gellately in *The Gestapo and German Society* (1990), has confirmed that the Gestapo was not a massive, all-embracing organisation, and that the image of Gestapo agents on every street corner and railway station is wrong. Surviving Gestapo files reveal a great deal about the organisation's operations, suggesting that the Gestapo was not as large or widespread as the propaganda suggested, and that it was in fact under-resourced, with inadequate numbers of personnel. At a time when Germany had a population of 69 million, the Gestapo probably had no more than 15 000 personnel, most of whom were not fanatical Nazis but career police, many whose careers began in the Weimar era. 'It is time,' argues Professor Richard Evans of Cambridge University, 'to ditch the image of the Gestapo officer as a brutal criminal-psychopathic demon in a black leather overcoat.'⁴ The Gestapo in fact posed no real threat to law-abiding citizens in Nazi Germany.

In the Nazi state, citizens were encouraged to report on each other, and the Gestapo depended very much on these denunciations or reports from ordinary Germans for the bulk of its work. In this way, the Nazi state was able to police what would normally be closed personal behaviour, including



The identification card of Wilhelm Höche, a criminal inspector with the Gestapo

private criticisms of the regime, and even intimate relationships between Germans and Jews, and homosexuality (all of which were illegal). The Gestapo did not have to look very hard – some 60 to 90 per cent of its cases began this way. While some denunciations were made out of a sense of duty to the regime, many of them were based on malicious rumours, or people settling personal grievances.

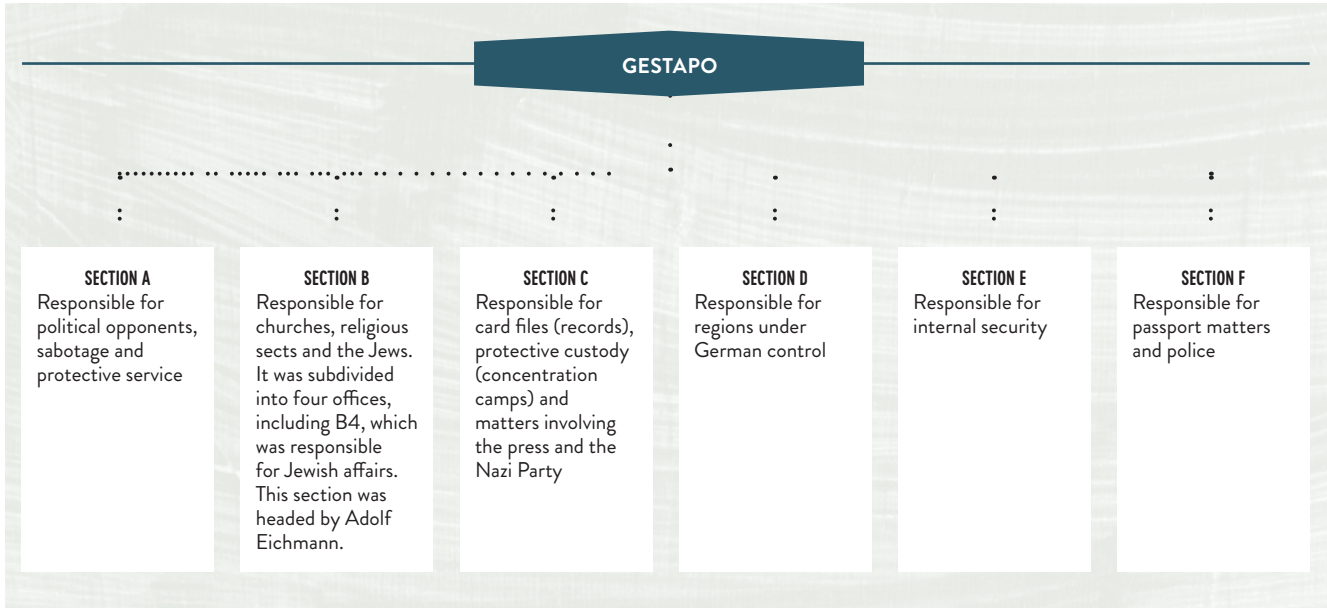
Denunciations were more common in large towns than in the close-knit, smaller village communities. In the town of Würzburg, where the complete Gestapo files survived the war, there were 174 reported cases of race defilement (relationships between Germans and Jews). Of these cases, only 1 per cent were

detected by the Gestapo itself. The bulk of the cases came from ordinary Germans making reports, and of these, 36 per cent were malicious.

By the time World War II broke out, the Gestapo employed only 45 000 people, although these people certainly controlled networks of informers. 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, were what kept the Gestapo and the terror state functioning. These networks of informers and agents included **block wardens**, police informers in every apartment block who reported on neighbourhood activity.



The Gestapo



The structure of the Gestapo

THE GESTAPO AT WORK

When Hindenburg appointed Herr Hitler chancellor this man issued a pamphlet [small poster] 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. He had also issued a pamphlet telling Catholics that the Concordat signed between Hitler and the Vatican would be betrayed by Hitler as soon as he had made what use he could of the Catholics.

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.

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

QUESTION

- 1 What insight does this extract provide about the nature of the terror state and how it operated?

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 any legal protection. 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 at the time, especially communists and socialists. The first camps, at Dachau and Oranienburg, were run by the SA. Within a year, a centralised concentration camp system had been 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 Order of the Death's Head, or Totenkopfverbände.

Between 1934 and 1939 more than 200 000 people passed through the concentration camps. When the war began in 1939 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 **Sinti/Romani** people (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.

After 1939, with new territorial conquests and thus more potential prisoners, the concentration camp system expanded rapidly to the east. Many of these camps were established near factories or quarries, where the prisoners were put to work – and usually worked to death. The official name for this policy was *Vernichtung durch Arbeit*, 'annihilation through work'. Among these camps were Auschwitz, established in 1940, and Majdanek, established in 1943. German companies working with the SS often profited from the forced labour.



IG Farben Chemical Company, which also supplied the poison gas for the death camps, set up a synthetic rubber plant near Auschwitz in 1942. It was staffed by forced labour from the nearby camp.

In 1938, in a government move to remove people classed as 'anti-social' from the national community, the SS arrested more than 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 brick-making factories.

THE SCHUTZSTAFFEL (SS)

Membership by 1939: 240 000 men

THE DEATH'S HEAD UNITS (Totenkopfverbände)

Established in 1936 to administer the concentration camp system. Their name came from the skull and bones insignia on their black uniforms

OPERATIONAL TASK FORCES (SS) (Einsatzgruppen)

Established in 1939, it operated in occupied territories of Europe and was ultimately responsible for the resettlement and extermination program.

WAFFEN SS

The military wing of the SS. Formed into military units, more than 300 000 *Waffen SS* died in the war

THE GESTAPO (Geheime Staatspolizei)

Established 1933: the secret police

THE SD (Sicherheitsdienst)

Established 1931: the intelligence agency of the SS, led by Reinhard Heydrich



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

The structure of the SS and police state



Dachau Concentration Camp near Munich. The camp was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence and a moat.

THE POLICE STATE AT WORK

SOURCE A: Living in the police state

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.

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

SOURCE B: Werner Best, Chief of the SD (the intelligence agency of the SS) on the rights of the SS

National Socialism's political principle of totalitarianism, which corresponds to the ideological principle of the organically indivisible national community, does not tolerate within its sphere the development of any political ideas at variance with the will of the majority ... To discover the enemies of the State, to watch them and render them harmless is the preventive police duty of the political police. In order to fulfil this duty the political police must be free to use every means suited to achieve the required end. It is correct to say that in the National Socialist Führer State, the institutions called upon to protect the state possess an authority, which is derived solely from the new conception of the State and one which requires no special legal legitimisation.

Helmut Krausnick and Martin Broszat, *Anatomy of the SS State*, Paladin, London, 1970, p. 427.

SOURCE C: A mother seeks information from the SS about her son, 1934

Translation:

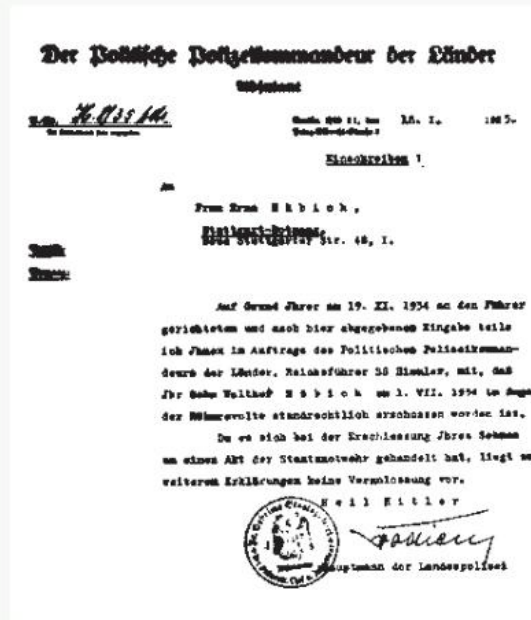
To Frau Erna Habich, Stuttgart

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

Helmut Krausnick and Martin Broszat, *Anatomy of the SS State*, Paladin, London, 1970, p. 433.



SOURCE D: Regulations at Dachau Concentration Camp issued by the commandant, Theodor Eicke, November 1933

Tolerance means weakness. In the light of this conception 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.

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

SOURCE E: Rudolf Höss, later Commandant of Auschwitz, recalls the orders of Theodor Eicke, Inspector of Concentration Camps, at Dachau, 1934

Any trace of pity revealed to the 'enemies of the State' is a weakness, which they would readily exploit. Any pity whatsoever for the 'enemies of the State' was unworthy of an SS man. There was no place in the ranks of the SS for men with soft hearts and any such men would do well to quickly retire to a monastery. He could only use hard determined men who ruthlessly obeyed every order. It was not for nothing that their emblem was a Death's Head and that they carried a loaded gun. They were the only soldiers who even in peace time faced the enemy day and night, the enemy behind the wire.

Helmut Krausnick and Martin Broszat, *Anatomy of the SS State*, Paladin, London, 1970, p. 433.

QUESTIONS

- 1 How does the author of Source A suggest the terror state affected everyday life?
- 2 What did the Chief of the SD (Source B) say was the purpose of the SS?
- 3 Explain why Source B would be useful to a historian studying the Nazi terror state. In your answer, consider the nature of the source and its content.
- 4 Refer to Source C. Why would 'no further explanation [be] required'?
- 5 What do you think was the purpose of Source C?
- 6 Explain the purpose of the Dachau concentration camp regulations (Source D).
- 7 What attitude and outlook is Eicke trying to build in his men (Source E)? Given the nature of the government system, why was this necessary?
- 8 Who were the 'enemies' Eicke was referring to?

Treatment of minority groups

Homosexuals

The Nazis introduced severe measures against homosexual men. Under Section 175 of the Criminal Code, homosexuality was declared illegal, and as a result some 100 000 men were arrested and 15 000 went 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. Lesbians were not subjected to systematic persecution. The death rate among homosexuals 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 uniform, and they were singled out by guards and inmates alike because of the widespread prejudice against homosexuals.

The Nazis also used the charge of homosexuality to discredit their political opponents. The leader of the SA, Ernst Röhm, was himself a homosexual, and charges of homosexuality among the SA leadership were used as one justification for the bloody purge of June 1934. Nazi leader Hermann Göring used a false accusation of homosexuality to remove the chief of the German army, General von Fritsch, in 1938.



Homosexuals in the Third Reich

The Sinti/Romani

The Nazis regarded Sinti/Romani people, or as they were more commonly known, Gypsies, as *Untermenschen* (inferior people). They were disliked because they were not racially German, and they were also seen as anti-social and unproductive because of their nomadic lifestyle. In this way, they challenged the Nazi idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* or National Community. In 1939 about a million Gypsies lived in Europe, with around 30 000 in Germany. Another 500 000 lived in eastern Europe, especially in the Soviet Union and Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. In 1940 all Gypsies in Germany were deported to the newly opened camps in Poland. Gypsies 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 Gypsies had been killed.



Sinto and Roma



Bundesarchiv, Bild 146-1987-108-36

A family photo of the Drisari family, Sinti/Roma people who lived in the area of Halle in Southern Germany in 1936

The mentally ill and the physically disabled

Between 1939 and 1945 the Nazis killed many thousands of people who were disabled or mentally ill. People in institutions and hospitals who were certified unfit by a specially selected team of doctors were killed simply because they were considered to have 'a life unworthy of living' (*lebensunwertes Leben*), and their continued survival was not considered to be in the interests of the nation.

The program began in October 1939 after Philipp Bouhler, an ambitious Nazi and Head of the Chancellery of the Führer, showed Hitler a letter from a man who did not want his young son, who was seriously disabled, to continue to live. Hitler signed a personal order that began the process of the killing of 5000 mentally and physically disabled children. The secret operation was codenamed T4, a reference to the street address, Tiergartenstrasse 4, of the headquarters in Berlin. Once the war began, more 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 and lethal doses of medication. The bodies were immediately cremated, fake death certificates were issued, and a standard letter of sympathy was sent to the relatives.

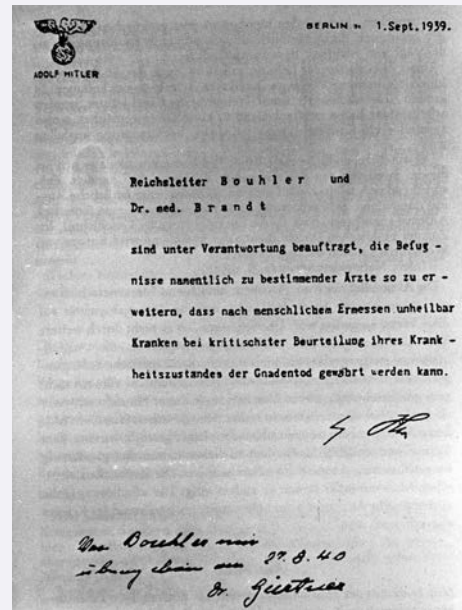
Philipp Bouhler and the euthanasia program

Philipp Bouhler was Head of Hitler's Chancellery and responsible for Hitler's private correspondence. His action in bringing a letter to Hitler's attention began the euthanasia program. Aware of Hitler's views on race and a world where the weak give way to the strong, Bouhler's action is a very good example of what has been called 'working towards the Führer'.

Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo



Philipp Bouhler (1899–1945)



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

Hitler's order of 1939, written on his own private letter paper, authorising the euthanasia program (see translation below)

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

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. Clemens von Galen, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Münster, displayed both personal and moral courage when he made it a public issue by denouncing the program in a series of sermons.

Archbishop von Galen

An extract from Archbishop von Galen's sermon, 3 August 1941

If the principle that man is entitled to kill his unproductive fellow man is established and applied, then woe to all of us when we become aged and infirm! Then no man will be safe: some committee or other will be able to put him on the list of 'unproductive' persons, who in their judgment have become 'unworthy to live' ...

Woe to our German people, if the divine commandment 'Thou shalt not kill', which the Lord proclaimed on Sinai amid thunder and lightning, ... is not merely violated but the violation is tolerated and remains unpunished ...

A state which transgresses this boundary laid down by God and permits or causes innocent persons to be punished is undermining its own authority and the respect for its sovereignty in the conscience of its citizens.



Getty Images/ulstein bild Dtl



Clemens von Galen (1876–1946), the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Münster who publicly denounced the Nazi euthanasia program in 1941

Bishop 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, more than 70 000 physically or mentally impaired Germans 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. This required the cooperation of some German doctors, who examined the medical files and prepared the names of people they believed to be mentally or physically disabled. By 1945, 275 000 mentally ill or disabled people had been killed.



Euthanasia programs

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/
National Archives and Records Administration, College Park



Dr Adolf Wahlmann (left), Chief Physician of the Hadamar Institute, and Karl Willig (right), a male nurse. After the war, Wahlmann was sentenced to life in prison and Willig was executed for the part they played in the euthanasia program.



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/National Archives
and Records Administration, College Park

The cemetery at the Hadamar Institute, where victims of the Nazi euthanasia program were buried in mass graves

A letter of sympathy on the death of a disabled person, 1940

Dear ...

As you are no doubt aware, your daughter Fraulein ... 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.

Eugen Kogon et al., *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas*, MS Fischer, Frankfurt, 1983, p. 50.

Interpreting the terror

Like most historical debates, the debate about how and to what degree the terror of the Nazi state affected the lives of ordinary Germans has changed with time and the study of the evidence.

Research into the structure and functioning of the Nazi state begun by scholars such as Martin Broszat, and studies on the daily lives of Germans, have offered a new interpretation of the nature of the Nazi terror. The prevailing view among historians is that Hitler's Germany rested not only on coercion but also on a very substantial degree of persuasion and popular support, helped in part by the all-embracing propaganda machine. It rejects the argument that the terror was total and all pervasive, and suggests that many Germans disobeyed Nazi controls in their daily lives. However, the reality was that the regime did not face significant opposition from the German people.

Robert Gellately, in his book *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (2001), suggests that millions of ordinary German citizens (such as, for example, the medical staff in the euthanasia program) were well aware of the true nature of the regime, and were in many cases active participants in the horrors that were carried out. Germans were also aware of the brutal removal of the communists and then other political opponents in 1933, and the elimination of elements of resistance within the Nazi Party itself the following year. Throughout the Nazi period, the press made no secret of the extensive use of death sentences, or of the arrest and detention of anyone who threatened the state or its authority.

This may have persuaded many Germans that opposition to the regime was futile, but this did not apply to all Germans. Many thousands did resist, from private acts of non-cooperation to public defiance, and many paid with their lives for doing so.

TERROR AND REPRESSION

- ◆ The great majority of the German people accepted the Nazi state, but a system of control and terror existed to deal with those who actively opposed the movement.
- ◆ The main instruments of the terror state were:
 - ◆ the SS: Schutzstaffel
 - ◆ the Gestapo: Geheime Staatspolizei
 - ◆ the network of concentration camps throughout Germany
 - ◆ police informers.



- ◆ The Nazi state also persecuted minority groups, including:
 - ◆ people who were seriously disabled and the mentally ill (the T4 program)
 - ◆ the Sinti/Romani
 - ◆ homosexuals
 - ◆ Jehovah's Witnesses.
- ◆ The Roman Catholic Bishop Clemens von Galen issued a very public protest about the euthanasia program, which caused Hitler to cancel it in August 1941 (although it was resumed a year later). This was one of the few examples of Nazi policy changing in the face of public opinion.

- 1 What role did each of the following play in the terror state?

i SS	iv Totenkopfverbände
ii <i>Waffen SS</i>	v Gestapo
iii Einsatzgruppen	
- 2 How has recent historical research changed the way many historians view the role and operation of the Gestapo?
- 3 Describe how the actions of a Nazi official like Philipp Bouhler were a good example of what has been called 'working towards the Führer'.
- 4 Explain why each of the following groups were not part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

i Jews	v homosexuals
ii communists and socialists	vi 'anti-socials'
iii Jehovah's Witnesses	vii lebensunwertes Leben (people with physical disabilities or mental illnesses)
iv Sinti & Romani people (Gypsies)	
- 5 Find primary sources about the experiences of one of the above groups, e.g. memoirs, photos, camp records. Prepare a two-page handout for the class about your group's experiences.

9.3

THE NAZI STATE AND THE ARMED FORCES

The army and the Nazis

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the army remained a powerful and respected force in German society. Although it was still relatively small because of the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, the earlier work of General von Seeckt in the 1920s had achieved results. The morale and discipline of the German army had been restored, the standing of the officer corps survived, and von Seeckt's goal of creating an army of leaders (*Führerheer*) had been achieved.

After the election of Field Marshal von Hindenburg as president in 1925, many army officers became more accepting of the Weimar Republic. The army also began to increase its involvement in political activity, as military figures close to the president, such as General von Schleicher, began to exercise great political influence. Hindenburg himself, as the former supreme commander in World

War I, was the embodiment of the German military tradition, and he was always very sensitive to the interests of the German army.

In 1933, when Hindenburg appointed Hitler as chancellor, the army did not oppose the move. Nor did they take any action when, under the cover of legality, Hitler established a one-party state and abolished German democracy.

Hitler placed great importance on winning the loyalty and support of the army, and from the moment he became chancellor he treated the army leadership with great care and respect. He promised to restore the army to its traditionally honoured place in German society, and he promised **rearmament**. The army was essential if Hitler was to carry out his future program of European expansion, and it was also the only force in German society after 1934 that was capable of threatening his regime. Although in the late 1930s and during the war Hitler was able to bend the army to his will, in the early years of the Nazi regime he had to move with caution in his dealings with them. Other aspects of German life were quickly brought under control, but there was no way the Nazis could do this to the army, with its proud tradition of independence.

For its part, the army was tempted by Hitler's promises of rearmament and the restoration of Germany as a great power. In 1930 Hitler said, 'I have always held the view that any attempt to replace the army was madness. None of us have any interest in replacing the army. We will see to it when we come to power, that out of the present *Reichswehr* [the German army during the Weimar Republic] a great army of the German people shall arise.'⁵ Many in the army, particularly the younger officers, were attracted by these promises.

Securing the loyalty of the army

At the end of his first year in power Hitler faced two major problems in his dealings with the German army. The first concerned the growing power of the stormtroopers (the SA), Hitler's private army, which had helped the Nazis to power. The army saw the SA and its leader, Ernst Röhm, as a threat. This was because of the size of the SA, and the ambition of Röhm and others to make the SA, rather than the army, the sole military force in the state. In 1934 the army made it clear that the price for their support was Hitler brining this dangerous force under control. In 1934 Hitler did this by eliminating Röhm in the so-called Night of the Long Knives, effectively ending the power of the SA.

The army was pleased at the way Hitler had dealt with Röhm and the SA leadership. This approval and acceptance of the murders, from the president down, was another step in Hitler's rise to absolute power and the start of the army's submission to the Nazi state. The army leadership offered no complaint when two of their own, General von Schleicher and General von Bredow, were also murdered in the process. The Defence Minister, General von Blomberg, expressed his 'absolute gratitude' to Hitler for dealing with the SA threat, and he forbade any officer to attend the funeral of General von Schleicher. The German army leaders, acting in their own interests, thought they were binding Hitler to support the interests of the German army. In reality, the army had begun the process of binding itself to Hitler.

The other problem for Hitler was the question of who would follow President von Hindenburg as head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Despite their approval of particular aspects of the Nazi regime, and the attraction many of the younger officers felt towards the Nazis, there is little doubt that as long as Hindenburg lived, the army would remain loyal to the president. However, by the middle of 1934 it was clear that Hindenburg, at the age of 87, had little time left. If Hitler was to take Hindenburg's position, he could not do it without the support of the German army.

Hitler becomes commander-in-chief of the armed forces

When Hindenburg died in August 1934, the army again offered no resistance when, within hours, Hitler abolished the presidency and assumed Hindenburg's authority. From this point the army began to lose its position of independence. All members of the armed forces were now required to

take an oath of loyalty, not to the state, but to Hitler personally. For members of the armed forces an oath was binding. A German officer could not break a solemn oath sworn on the colours (the flag) at a military ceremony.

The Defence Minister, Field Marshal von Blomberg, who had been Hindenburg's appointment, came to admire Hitler. 'The Führer is cleverer than we are,' he told his officers, 'he will plan and do everything correctly.'⁶ Blomberg wished to strengthen the role of the army and he believed that this would be achieved through cooperation with the regime and its policy of rearmament. The Nazi salute was introduced into the army, the swastika appeared on the uniform, and Jews were removed from the armed forces. Increasing numbers of younger officers were accepting the Nazis' ideas about race. The importance of the nation and the *Volk* (people) became part of the training programs at military colleges. The emphasis on nationalism had wide appeal, and many in the officer corps who had difficulty accepting the Weimar Republic, with its divisions and lack of discipline, found the Nazi regime more acceptable.

Rearmament: the new German army

Almost as soon as the Nazis came to power Germany began to rearm. In June 1933 a figure of 35 billion reichsmarks was earmarked to be spent on German rearmament over the next eight years (almost 4.4 million per annum). The military allocations for the army, navy and air force all took place in secret, and any claims that Germany was starting to rearm were denied. But the cover of secrecy could only be maintained for so long. In October 1934 Hitler authorised an increase in the size of the German army, and by the end of 1934 it had grown to 280 000 men. In March 1935 he announced the reintroduction of conscription, with plans to build up an army of 36 divisions, or 500 000 men. The fact that rearmament was forbidden under the Treaty of Versailles was ignored, and the Western powers made no response. By 1939 the German army stood at 1.4 million.

The rapid increase in the size of the army also changed its social composition. In the highest ranks of the army the old Junker aristocracy maintained their influence, and only seven of Hitler's 18 field marshals did not come from the nobility. However, after 1934 the majority of the officers came from middle-class backgrounds rather than from the old privileged elite. In Nazi Germany the social gap that had existed between officers and men began to close, and loyal, capable soldiers could look forward to promotion regardless of their social or family background. By the late 1930s many of these young soldiers were influenced by the Hitler Youth movement and Nazi concepts such as the idea of the national community. This helped foster closer bonds between the officers and the enlisted men, which became a feature of the new German army.



Adolf Hitler inspecting the first German U-boats at Kiel, Germany, in August 1935. Under the Treaty of Versailles Germany was forbidden from building submarines, but after Hitler came to power the construction of U-boats and the training of crews began as part of the wider program of German rearmament

Why did the army not oppose the Nazis?

There were many reasons why the German army did not oppose the Nazi regime, including:

- ◆ the tradition in the German army to stay out of politics
- ◆ the appeal of some aspects of the Nazi program, especially its nationalism and the promise of rearmament
- ◆ the Nazis' promise that the German army would be the 'sole bearer of arms in Germany'
- ◆ Hitler's elimination of the threat of his own private army, the SA
- ◆ the sympathy of officers, in particular the younger officers, for the Nazi movement
- ◆ the deliberate policy of Hitler to treat the army leadership with care and respect
- ◆ the oath of loyalty all members of the armed forces took in 1934 to Hitler personally when he became commander-in-chief of the armed forces after the death of President von Hindenburg
- ◆ the success Hitler achieved in his foreign policy moves and with his policy of rearmament after 1934.

The army also began to develop new techniques of warfare. Colonel Heinz Guderian pushed for the use of armour as the prime attacking force in future campaigns. Hitler embraced the concept of mechanised armour, and the first Panzer corps were formed in the army. The tank came to play an essential role in military planning, and in December 1933 the Krupp steelworks began work on tank construction. Later models of these heavily armed and speedy tanks were used with devastating effect when the war began.

In May 1935 the *Wehrmacht Defence Law* came into force. The term *Wehrmacht* ('armed forces') replaced the term *Reichswehr*. The three branches of the *Wehrmacht* were defined as the Army, the Navy (*Kriegsmarine*) and the Air Force (*Luftwaffe*).

In September 1936 Hitler introduced the Four-Year Plan, which aimed to make Germany self-sufficient in essential commodities such as oil, iron ore, textiles and food, and to make the country ready for war by 1940. The allied blockade of Germany in World War I had caused severe hardship. This was not to happen again.

GERMAN MILITARY EXPENDITURE, 1932–1939

Year	Amount (in billion reichsmarks)	As a % of national income
1932	0.76	0.80%
1933	1.2	1.90%
1934	3.6	4.10%
1935	5.4	6.00%
1936	10.2	10.80%
1937	10.9	11.70%
1938	17.2	17.20%
1939	38	30.00%

RJ Overy, *Economic History Review*, vol. 32, 1979, p. 113.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Based on this evidence, what can you infer about the role of the army in Germany from 1934?
- 2 Why did the military expenditure amount increase significantly after 1935?

The navy and the air force

In March 1933 the secret Air Ministry was set up under the control of Hermann Göring, who took to the task of rebuilding German air power with great enthusiasm. Airfields were built, and under the cover of the German Air Sports League, pilots were trained in private flying and glider clubs. Two aviation companies, Junkers and Heinkel, started to produce military transport planes, training craft and the first bombers. Despite the fact that under the Treaty of Versailles Germany was forbidden to have an air force, Hitler openly announced its existence in 1935. In German military thinking, the air force was to have the dual role of delivering attacks on the enemy and providing air support for the ground forces, particularly the mobile armoured divisions that the army was planning.

The navy was not overlooked as Germany began its policy of rearmament. Submarines, which had proven to be such an effective weapon in World War I, were given priority. Submarine engineers worked at the Krupp plant in neighbouring Holland during the 1920s, keeping up with the latest technology. Submarine construction began in Germany in 1934, and the number of U-boats in the new navy grew quickly. By the time war began in 1939, Germany had a U-boat fleet of 57, and it then expanded even more rapidly. Work also began on the construction of a modern surface fleet. In 1934 the pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spree* was launched, followed by two light battleships, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau*. In 1936 work began on the battleships *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz*, and plans were provided for 10 battleships by the year 1944.

Changes in the army leadership, 1938

If Hitler was to carry out his foreign policy it was essential to have total control over the armed forces. In the early years of the regime, the army leadership had been treated with great care, but from 1938, reflecting the strength of his position, Hitler moved to establish his absolute authority over the army.

Hitler was already having doubts about his Minister for War, Field Marshal von Blomberg,



Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/Heinrich Hoffmann

Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring (1893–1946), Head of the German Air Force. Göring became the second most important figure in Nazi Germany after Hitler declared him his successor in 1939, and gave him the special rank of Reichsmarschall.



imagefolk/World History Archive/Ann Ronan

Field Marshall Werner von Blomberg (left), General Werner von Fritsch and Admiral Erich Raeder in 1936. The removal of Blomberg and Fritsch in 1938 allowed Hitler to assume the position of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

and his army commander-in-chief, General von Fritsch. Both were from the conservative aristocratic elite, and Blomberg, who had been a loyal supporter of the regime, had been Hindenburg's appointment. Hitler believed that the pace of rearmament could be faster, and he was convinced that both men lacked the will or sense of purpose to carry out the required tasks.

Early in 1938 Hitler was able to remove both men from their posts. In January, Blomberg, a widower, married his 24-year-old secretary, Eva Gruhn. Both Hitler and Göring attended the wedding. The following month Göring passed a police file to Hitler that revealed that Gruhn had been a registered prostitute. The disgrace was such that Blomberg was forced to resign.

In the same month, General von Fritsch was accused of homosexuality. Himmler provided Hitler with details of a case linking Fritsch with a homosexual blackmailer. Although Fritsch was in fact innocent of the charge, and the blackmailer was referring to another man by the name of Fritsch, the accusation was enough to destroy his career and he too resigned. To conceal the fact that Fritsch was innocent, the Gestapo had the blackmailer shot.

The removal of Blomberg and Fritsch in February 1938 gave Hitler the opportunity he sought to reorganise the army leadership. Another 16 generals who were thought to lack sympathy for the regime were also retired. Hitler himself assumed the position of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He set up a new body, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW), the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, and appointed the compliant General Wilhelm Keitel as its head and General Walther von Brauchitsch as the new army commander. Hitler had managed to purge the conservative army leadership, achieving the final phase of *Gleichschaltung*. The top army leadership was now either pro-Nazi or incapable of opposing the government. Once again, the army did not oppose these changes. 'The army had demonstrated its weakness,' wrote historian Ian Kershaw. 'Hitler recognised the weakness, was increasingly contemptuous of the officer corps, and saw himself more and more in the role not only of Head of State but also of a great military leader.'⁷



Rearmament

9.3 SUMMARY

HITLER AND THE GERMAN ARMED FORCES

- ◆ The army was an influential and independent force in German society.
- ◆ After the election of Hindenburg as president, some army officers became more involved in political activity.
- ◆ Hitler knew that it was essential to win the loyalty and support of the army, as it could not be brought under control by force as other groups in German society could be.
- ◆ Some in the German army, particularly many younger officers, were tempted by the Nazis' promises of rearmament and the restoration of German honour and prestige.
- ◆ The army played a vital role in Hitler's future plans for Germany and Europe.
- ◆ In 1934 Hitler eliminated the threat of the SA, which had been a major barrier to the army's acceptance of the Nazi movement.
- ◆ When President von Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler combined the offices of chancellor and president and became commander-in-chief of the armed forces.
- ◆ Members of the German armed forces took an oath of loyalty to Hitler himself.
- ◆ From 1934 Germany began a policy of deliberate rearmament, launching a four-year economic plan that aimed to make Germany self-sufficient in vital commodities.
- ◆ In 1938 Hitler removed the last of the conservative military leaders, including General von Blomberg, who had been Hindenburg's appointment.
- ◆ Hitler himself assumed the position of Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces.

- 1 Write the correct year beside the correct event.
 1933 1934 1935 1938
 i The *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces, OKW) was created.
 ii Hitler became commander-in-Chief of the German armed forces.
 iii The Krupp steelworks began work on German tank construction.
 iv Germany re-introduced conscription.
- 2 'From 1933 the German army cooperated with the Nazi regime.' Prepare a list of points to support this statement.
- 3 Why was the Blomberg–Fritsch crisis significant?
- 4 How did the role of the army change between 1919 and 1939?
- 5 Extended response: Account for the changing role of the army in Germany between 1918 and 1939.

9.4

OPPOSITION TO HITLER

Before Hitler was appointed chancellor, the highest vote the Nazis received in a free election was 37.4 per cent, in July 1932. A significant number of Germans did not support the Nazi movement before it came to power in January 1933. After 1933, however, there was very little organised opposition to the Nazis, and increasing numbers of Germans came to accept Nazi rule and were either supportive of or sympathetic to it. There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- ◆ the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda, particularly with the focus on the new People's Community
- ◆ the role of propaganda to ensure that any expressions of opposition would not become public
- ◆ the re-establishment of order and stability
- ◆ the real economic gains as Germany overcame the problems associated with the Depression
- ◆ the dramatic drop in unemployment and the improvement in real living standards
- ◆ the genuine popularity of Hitler himself
- ◆ the restoration of Germany's national honour.

However, many Germans were distressed at the way the country had changed under the Nazis. Others were unhappy about the increasing anti-Semitism, and the loss of personal freedom and liberty in the new one-party state, with its secret police and concentration camps.

Two forms of opposition were possible in Nazi Germany:

- ◆ **Institutional opposition** from groups like other political parties, trade unions, the army, and institutions such as the churches.
- ◆ **Personal opposition** from individuals or smaller groups in German society.

From the very start, the Nazis effectively eliminated the potential for most institutional opposition. Political parties other than the Nazis were abolished, many left-wing opponents from the SPD and the KPD were harshly treated and imprisoned, all trade unions were closed, and the army was pacified by the elimination of the threat from the SA and was pleased by the new emphasis on military rearmament. Archbishop Clemens von Galen, the Catholic Archbishop of Münster, was able to voice opposition (over the euthanasia program) and have some success in influencing Nazi policy, but otherwise neither the Protestant nor Roman Catholic churches



Resistance

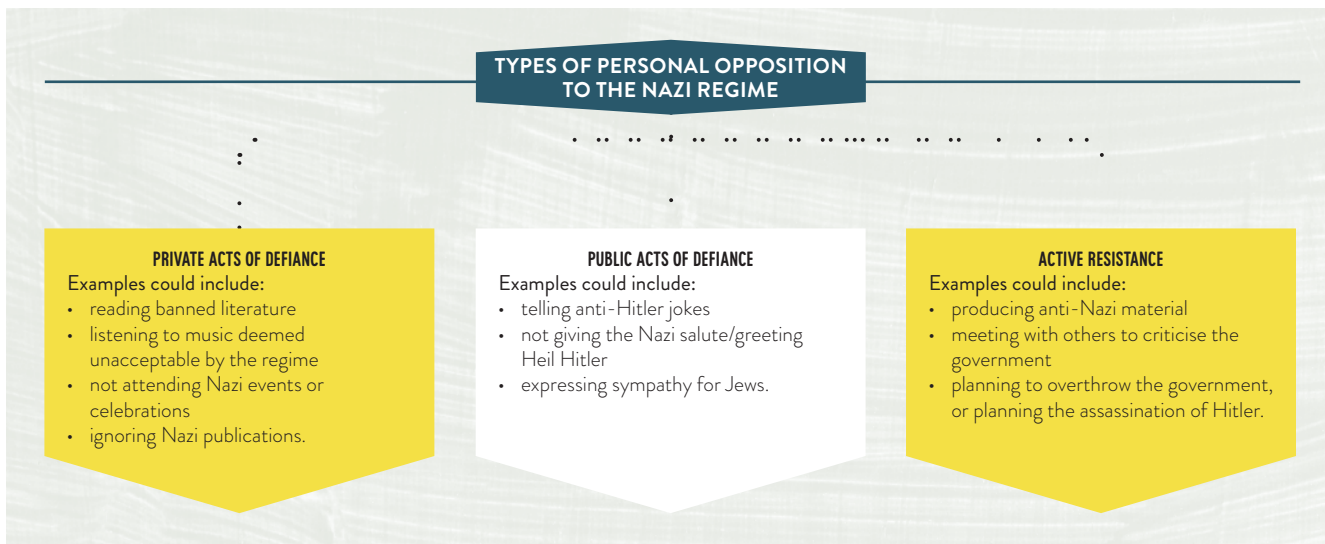
were influential points of opposition to the Nazis. The Nazis were prepared to arrest outspoken church critics, and the few brave church figures who did speak out suffered, such as Pastor Martin Niemöller, who spent eight years in a concentration camp. Niemöller survived the war and died in 1984. he is believed to have written a simple but effective poem about the importance of the individual in resisting evil, although there is some doubt about the poem's authorship.

Poem by Pastor Martin Niemöller

They came first for the Socialists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.
Then they came for me,
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

Martin Niemöller

Personal opposition to the Nazi regime involved opposition by individuals or small groups. It could vary from an individual privately detesting the Nazis to individuals who expressed their opposition more publicly, and often suffered as a consequence.



Types of personal opposition to the Nazi regime

AUGUST LANDMESSER



Alamy Stock Photo/Paul Fearn

SOURCE STUDY

A private act of defiance in a public setting. August Landmesser, a worker at the Blohm + Voss shipyard in Hamburg, refusing to give the Nazi salute at the launch of the naval training vessel *Horst Wessel* in June 1936

QUESTIONS

- 1 Apart from not giving the Nazi salute, what other acts of private defiance could individuals take against the Nazi regime?
- 2 What impact did private acts of defiance have?
- 3 The ship being launched was the naval training vessel *Horst Wessel*. Why was it named this? What happened to the ship?

Another man who took a private act of defiance to a very different level was a German clockmaker named Georg Elser who, acting alone, tried to assassinate Hitler. Elser planted a bomb within the wall behind Hitler's speaking platform in the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich, timed to go off as Hitler spoke at the annual celebration of the Munich Putsch. Eight people were killed when the time bomb exploded on 9 November 1939, but Hitler, who had left just 13 minutes earlier, was unharmed.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

The aftermath of Georg Elser's time bomb, which he intended to kill Hitler in Munich on 9 November 1939. Hitler had left the speaker's platform only a short time before the explosion, which killed eight people.

Some resistance organisations

More organised resistance groups began to emerge during the war years. They tended to be individuals or small groups who were moved by their conscience, a feeling of responsibility for their country or revulsion at the injustice of the system. Because these groups were isolated and lacked coordination, they were ineffective, but those who were detected paid a fearful price.

Edelweiss Pirates

Some young people in Germany were not prepared to accept the Nazi regime. Mainly young men of working-class background aged between 16 and 18 years, they formed subcultures that rejected Nazism. Although the groups had different names, they are known today as the Edelweiss Pirates because the Edelweiss flower was their common symbol. They rejected the Hitler Youth and evaded service in the Reich Labour Service and the army. Their lifestyle was an expression of resistance to the conservative conformity that became Nazi Germany. During the war many engaged in more active defiance, such as secretly placing anti-Nazi slogans in public places or assisting deserters or people fleeing from the authorities. When they were arrested these young protestors were severely punished or sent to concentration camps. In 1944 Himmler ordered 13 of them to be publicly hanged in the city of Cologne. There was no trial.



Edelweiss Pirates



Bridgeman Images

A group of the Edelweiss Pirates about to be hanged near the Cologne railway station in November 1944

The Kreisau Circle

The Kreisau Circle (named after the family estate of its leader, Helmuth von Moltke) was a small group of conservative Germans, including some church figures and scholars who opposed the Nazi regime but were restrained from trying to overthrow it by their Christian principles. They met to discuss the future of Germany after the Nazis, envisioning a new Germany based on Christian

ethics. Their plan was not so much to overthrow the regime, but rather, to formulate the ideals upon which a new Germany would be based after the tyranny ended. During the war they passed information to the British about conditions in Nazi Germany. In January 1944 Moltke was arrested, and some members of the Circle put aside their Christian principles and supported the unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944. By the end of 1944 many in the Kreisau Circle, including Moltke, had been executed.



The Kreisau Circle

The White Rose

The Edelweiss Pirates were not the only young people to question the regime. Other dissident groups emerged in some of the German universities, the most significant being a movement called the White Rose. Founded by Sophie Scholl and her brother Hans at the University of Munich, the White Rose came to include a large group of students who resisted the Nazis by printing pamphlets demanding an end to the regime. In February 1943 both Sophie and Hans, along with fellow White Rose member Christopher Probst, were arrested, sentenced to death by the People's Court and guillotined the same afternoon.



The White Rose



imagefolk/dpa; ulstein bild

From left to right: Hans Scholl (1918–1943) his sister Sophie Scholl (1921–1943) and Christopher Probst (1919–1943), leaders of a student resistance-group 'White Rose'. They were executed in 1943.

Protecting the Reich

The majority of the German people remained loyal to the regime throughout the war, but, as the war situation grew worse and early victories gave way to defeats, elements of disillusion and discontent began to surface within German society.

The ruthlessness of the SS and the Gestapo in protecting the internal security of the Reich grew as the war went on. Himmler's power and influence increased as the SS expanded its control and authority in the new territories conquered by Germany. 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, engaged in defeatist talk, listened to foreign broadcasts on the radio, or even made 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 people in concentration camps also increased rapidly during the war years, many of them people from the occupied territories under German control.

WHY WAS OPPOSITION TO THE NAZI REGIME INEFFECTIVE?

Fear

- Through the loss of civil and basic rights
- Through the absence of legal protection
- Through agencies such as the SA, SS, the Gestapo and other police activities
- Through the activity of denunciations by fellow Germans

The increasing control over people's everyday lives

- Through organisations like the Hitler Youth, The German Labour Front, Strength Through Joy and others, lives were controlled and organised.

No mass organisations to coordinate opposition

- Potential centres of opposition were eliminated, political parties (except the Nazis) were closed, opponents imprisoned.
- The abolition of trade unions
- The ineffectiveness of the conservative forces that helped put Hitler into power

The impact of propaganda

- It was very effective in winning the support of many Germans.
- The all-embracing censorship from the Ministry for Propaganda eliminated the ability and desire to change the system. The impossibility of being able to change anything encouraged a feeling of increased public apathy.

The element of Nazi success until 1940

- The Nazis delivered a measure of success, which won a considerable degree of popular support.
- Compared with the period of the Weimar Republic, the Nazis appeared in the 1930s to be taking Germany forward to better times.
- The economy recovered, the threat of communism was eliminated and the standard of living for the average German improved. Many German nationalists were satisfied as Germany recovered its standing in the international community.

Historical debate: Opposition in the Third Reich

In the 1960s and 1970s the structuralist school of historical interpretation, led by German historians Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, presented a challenging new insight into how Nazi Germany operated. This was different to the earlier interpretation, which saw the German people as victims of a totalitarian regime that came to power amid the difficulties Germany experienced after World War I.

Continued research by a new generation of scholars has added to our knowledge of how the Nazi state operated. Among these historians and their works are Klaus-Michael Mallman, *Nazism and German Society 1933–1945* (1994), Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (2001), and the work of Detlev Peukert.

Some of these historians challenge the idea that Germany was a true totalitarian state, suggesting that Germany was not a rigid totalitarian state but rather a state where a great deal of initiative was left to the Germans themselves. From this idea, another question emerges: To what degree did the German people support rather than oppose Hitler?

Is it true, in the words of historian Karl-Heinz Reuband, that 'Hitler and National Socialism were so immensely popular among most Germans that intimidation and terror were rarely needed to enforce loyalty'? The historical evidence reaffirms that the Nazi regime was brutal and that it used terror and coercion, but also that there was not a great deal of opposition to Hitler. The German people would complain about everyday life, and there was a widely held view that problems could be resolved 'if only the Führer knew', but this could not be called widespread opposition or resistance.

CONFORMITY AND OPPOSITION

SOURCE A: Report from the German SPD in exile, 1937

It becomes increasingly evident that the majority of the people have two faces: one which they show to their good and reliable acquaintance; and the other for the authorities, the party officers, keen Nazis for strangers. The private face shows the sharpest criticism of everything that is going on now; the official one beams with optimism and contentment.

Quoted in Chris Hilton and John Hite, *Weimar and Nazi Germany*, John Murray, 2000, p. 326.

SOURCE B: From the Canadian historian Robert Gellately

Most Germans accepted the legitimacy of Hitler's government and were willing to comply and obey. There is little doubt that many welcomed the restoration of 'law and order', the destruction of the 'communist threat', the elimination of unemployment and establishment of the economy on a better footing ... given these and other legitimate successes, it has to be said that many people did not need to be terrorised or coerced as much as tempted and enticed into offering their support for the regime.

Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point being made in Source A.
- 2 According to Robert Gellately (Source B), why did many Germans support and accept Hitler rather than oppose him?
- 3 Do the opinions in Source A provide support for or challenge those in Source B?

OPPOSITION IN NAZI GERMANY

- ◆ There were two forms of opposition possible in Nazi Germany:
 - ◆ institutional opposition from groups such as other political parties, trade unions, the army, and institutions like the churches
 - ◆ personal opposition from individuals or smaller groups in German society.
- ◆ After 1934 institutional opposition was effectively ended, with the exception of the armed forces.
- ◆ The armed forces remained the only element in German society that had the ability to remove Hitler after 1934, but in the main it too had been brought under control, with its compliant leadership and the oath of loyalty that every member of the armed forces swore to Hitler personally.
- ◆ Only late in the war did the army mount any serious challenge to Hitler's authority, and this too failed.
- ◆ Personal acts of opposition to the Nazi regime took many forms, and the penalty for people engaged in these activities was always severe.

- 1 Create a mind map about opposition to the Nazi regime. Include the different types of opposition and the various groups and individuals who opposed the regime.
- 2 Outline some of the reasons why people might not have actively opposed the Nazis.
- 3 Why did opposition to the Nazis increase during the war?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTION

- 1 Extended response: 'The limited opposition to the Nazis was due to their effective use of a carrot and stick approach.' To what extent is this statement valid?

Endnotes

- 1 Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*, Angus & Robertson, London, 1976, p. 26.
- 2 Audrey Salkeld, *A Portrait of Leni Riefenstahl*, Random House UK, Pimlico, 1997, p. 272.
- 3 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, Profiles in Power*, Routledge, London, 2013, p. 89.
- 4 Richard Evans, 'Hitler's People' in *BBC History*, January 2006, p. 46.
- 5 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship*, Praeger, New York, 1970, p. 193.
- 6 Quoted in *The Third Reich, Fists of Steel*, Time-Life Inc., New York, 1988, p. 80.
- 7 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, 1936–1945: Nemesis*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, London, 2000, p. 60.

10

CHAPTER

The racial state: Policy and practice

10.1

ANTI-SEMITISM AND
THE PRE-WAR TREATMENT
OF THE JEWS



A Jewish-owned shop
after being vandalised
by Nazis and covered
with anti-Semitic graffiti,
November 1938

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

Aryanisation

The transfer of property from Jewish to non-Jewish ownership.

boycott

A refusal to deal with or trade with a particular person or organisation.

genocide

The killing of an entire race.

ghettos

Defined parts of some European cities to which the Jewish population was

restricted and where they were forced to remain.

pogroms

Attacks on a Jewish community by members of a particular section of society. The term is often used to describe the attacks on the Jewish people in late-nineteenth-century Russia.

synagogue

A place of worship for the Jewish faith.

Völkisch Movement

A nationalist movement from the late nineteenth 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 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.

TIMELINE

The racial state

1933 JANUARY

The Nazis came to power in Germany.

APRIL

Boycott of Jewish businesses throughout the Reich. The *Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools* removed many Jewish students from schools. The *Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service* began the removal of Jews from government jobs.

SEPTEMBER

The Reich Chamber of Culture was established. Jews were gradually excluded from the cultural life of the nation. The *Hereditary Farm Law* banned Jews from owning farmland.

1935 SEPTEMBER

The Nuremberg Laws were announced. Jews lost their right to German citizenship and were forbidden to marry Germans.

1936 AUGUST

The Olympic Games were held in Berlin. Anti-Semitic activity was deliberately reduced for the duration of the Games.

1938 JULY

All Jewish doctors were removed from the medical register and were permitted to treat only 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 'Israel' to their names.

OCTOBER

All Jews were required to have the letter 'J' stamped in red in their passports.

NOVEMBER

Kristallnacht. The destruction of Jewish synagogues and property across much of Germany. 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.

DECEMBER

The takeover or 'Aryanisation' of all Jewish businesses began.

10.1

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE PRE-WAR TREATMENT OF THE JEWS

The term Anti-Semitism refers to hostility or hatred towards the Jewish people. Anti-Semitic feeling is not new – Jewish communities have faced prejudice and violence throughout history. In the first century CE, the Jewish people were driven from their homeland by the Romans, becoming a dispossessed people who settled in other lands. In some countries, these Jewish populations suffered deliberate attacks (or **pogroms**) from the larger non-Jewish populations. Despite these attacks, the Jews survived, both as a people and as a religion.

There were many factors that contributed to anti-Semitic feelings. Religion is one of the elements that set the Jews apart. Jews are not Christians, and they practise religious rites that were very different from the predominantly Christian communities of Europe at the time. Until recent times, anti-Jewish feeling had always been a part of Christianity, because the Jews do not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. They observe the Sabbath (Saturday) as their day of prayer and they have their own distinctive religious holidays, such as Passover. Jewish culture and traditions were also factors in establishing and maintaining a distinctively Jewish identity. Jewish communities generally spoke their own language – Yiddish, in eastern and central Europe – they supported each other, they tended to live in particular sections of the cities they resided in, they married within the Jewish faith, and they excelled in particular professions, particularly in crafts, textiles and other trades, and banking and financial enterprises. By the modern era, the largest concentration of Jews was in eastern Europe.

The Nazi policy towards the Jews in the mid-twentieth century was the most brutal and horrific example of anti-Semitism in history. During World War II the Nazis developed a deliberate policy to kill the Jews who lived in Germany and in German-occupied areas. In 1933 the Jewish population in these areas numbered approximately 9 million (about 60 per cent of the world's Jews). By the end of the war in 1945, almost 6 million Jews had been killed (including 1 million children). Two out of every three European Jews had been killed in the worst example of **genocide** in history.



Anti-semitism pre-1933

‘The Jews are our misfortune’: German nationalism and the Jews

By the nineteenth century Jews had won greater acceptance in German society. The Jewish community in Germany made a very important contribution to the intellectual, financial, educational and cultural life of the nation. They were also loyal Germans, and displayed this loyalty by fighting for Germany in World War I (more than 100 000 Jewish soldiers served, and close to 12 000 died during the conflict). In the Weimar Republic they won even greater acceptance. Germany was home to about 500 000 Jews – about 1 per cent of the German population. Until the Nazis came to power in 1933, anti-Semitic feeling was less prominent in Germany than in the neighbouring states of France, Austria and Poland. In the liberal and democratic Weimar Republic, German Jews enjoyed equal rights with all other Germans, and many rose to high positions in the civil service and the government.

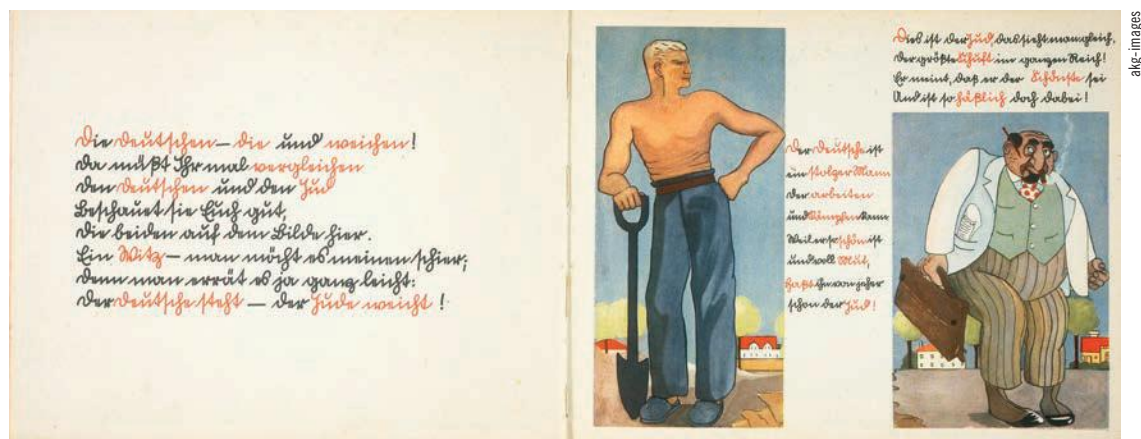
For others, however, the Jews represented a challenge to the German concept of nation. In the late nineteenth century the **Völkisch Movement** developed in Germany. This was a collection of nationalist and racist movements of German philosophers, writers and artists who saw the Jewish influence as a challenge to German culture and the German nation. Nationalists saw Germany as

a community of pure Germans, and from this view the idea developed that people who were not German needed to be excluded rather than assimilated. By the start of the twentieth century, this idea of a racially pure people came to embrace the concept of the pure Aryan race, of which the Jews were not a part. The German historian Heinrich von Treitschke, writing in the 1880s, said, *‘Die Juden sind unser Unglück’* (‘The Jews are our misfortune’). It was a slogan that the Nazis were happy to borrow in the 1930s.

Hitler’s anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was the central, consistent theme of Nazism. From his earliest days as a political agitator to his last days in the bunker, Hitler had the hatred of the Jews at the heart of his world view. It was an obsession that never waned. Many historians believe that Hitler acquired his anti-Semitism during his years of lonely struggle in the backstreets of Vienna before World War I. Anti-Semitic ideas were prominent in Viennese society, and Hitler’s ideas were shaped by the material he read and the ideas of the Völkisch Movement.

In Hitler’s view, civilisations and nations decline when they fail to maintain the purity of their race. ‘Mixing of blood and lowering of racial quality,’ according to Hitler, is the ‘sole cause for the decline of all culture, for humans do not perish from lost wars but from the loss of that power of resistance that is characteristic only of pure blood’.¹ In Hitler’s mind, the fundamental duty of government was to preserve the racial purity of the state, for this would ensure that the superior race maintained its dominance over inferior races.



Hitler’s ideas on race are reflected in this illustration from a children’s reading book from 1936. Note the contrast between the way the Nazis presented the German Aryan and the Jew.

To Hitler, the Jew represented the absolute contrast to the Aryan. If the Aryans were the creators of culture and civilisation, the Jews were the destroyer, for they had no nation or culture of their own. They were ‘a parasite in the body of other nations, contaminating the purity of the blood, exploiting and corrupting the nation’.² Hitler believed that there was a Jewish world conspiracy, and he was absolutely certain that the Jews were responsible for all the evils that had befallen Germany – defeat in war, revolution and economic collapse. Above all, the Jews as a people threatened Hitler’s vision of a pure national racial community.

Hitler also linked his hatred of the Jews with his hatred of Marxism or communism, and the fact that many of the leaders of the Russian or Bolshevik revolution were Jewish. He believed in the idea of a Jewish Bolshevik world conspiracy that was a threat to Germany and to Aryan civilisation.



Hitler’s anti-Semitism

ANTI-SEMITIC CARTOON



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Frank Liebermann

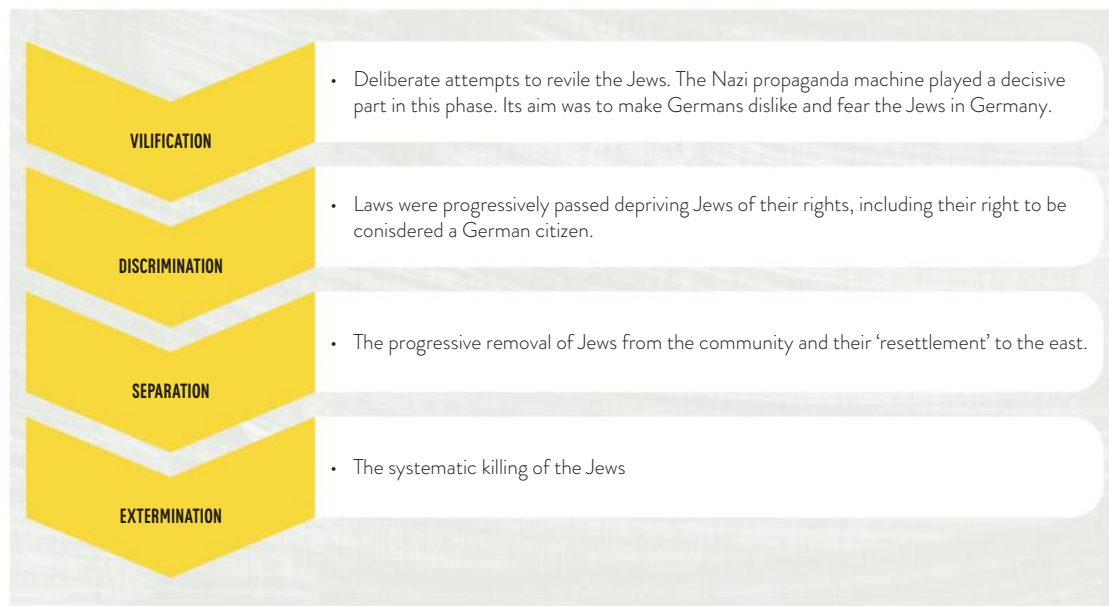
QUESTIONS

- 1 What was the basis of Hitler's anti-Semitism?
- 2 Which of his beliefs about Jews is represented in this cartoon from *Der Stürmer*?

An anti-Jewish cartoon published in the German publication *Der Stürmer*

The pre-war persecution of the Jews

British historian Richard Overy has suggested that Nazi racial policy towards the Jews can be broken into four distinct phases.



Phases of Nazi racial policy towards Jews



SA men wearing boycott signs block the entrance to a Jewish-owned shop. The signs read, 'Germans, defend yourselves, do not buy from Jews!'

In the struggle for power, the Nazis never concealed their anti-Semitism, and after 1933 they began their deliberate persecution of the Jews. This persecution was gradual and constant, and increased in both degree and severity in the years before the outbreak of war in 1939.

Between 1933 and 1935 the Nazis passed laws that removed Jews from the civil service and from the education, 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 the same month the government approved a **boycott** of Jewish businesses, Jewish shops, and the offices of Jewish professionals. SA men painted slogans on Jewish businesses and prevented Germans from entering Jewish shops. The SA were so anxious to express the anti-Semitic policy of the new regime, they were

in fact restrained by the government. In September the *Hereditary Farm Law* banned Jews from owning farmland. As Dr Goebbels took control of the Reich Chamber of Culture, Jews were expelled from the artistic and cultural life of the nation. They were also 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 rural villages and small towns than in the great cities.

ASPECTS OF ANTI-SEMITISM

SOURCE A: Hitler on the Jews

What we must fight for is to safeguard the existence and reproduction of our race and our people ... the purity of our blood ... so that our people may mature for the fulfilment of the mission allotted to it by the creator of the universe ...

The mightiest contrast to the Aryan is represented by the Jew. In hardly any people in the world is the instinct of self preservation developed more strongly than in the so-called 'chosen'... Hence the Jewish people, despite all apparent intellectual qualities, is without any true culture and especially without any culture of its own. What they do accomplish in the field of art is either patchwork or intellectual theft ... The Jew is always a parasite in the body of other peoples ... His spreading is a typical phenomenon for all parasites, he always seeks a new feeding ground for his race ... Thus the Jew has lived in the states of other peoples and there formed his own state which sailed under the disguise of a 'religious community'. But as soon as he felt strong enough to do without the protective cloak, he always dropped the veil and suddenly became what so many of the others previously did not want to believe and see — the Jew.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, Hutchinson, London, 1969, pp. 195, 257–77.

SOURCE B: From the German historian KS Pinson

The Jew, in the Nazi ideology, was the embodiment of all their enemies rolled into one. He was the 'November Criminal' and the traitor; he was both a Marxist and an international capitalist ... above all he was the debaser of the purity of the German race ... all civilisations of the past, according to Nazi doctrine, decayed and disappeared because of race mixture. The cultivation of racial purity was, according to Hitler, the real end and purpose of the state.

KS Pinson, *Modern Germany*, Macmillan, London, 1966, p. 494.

QUESTIONS

- 1 From the extract from *Mein Kampf*, prepare a list of the main claims Hitler makes against the Jewish people.
- 2 Why did the Nazis believe the Jews were the 'November Criminal[s]' in Source B?
- 3 Why did the Nazis believe the Jews posed a threat to Germany? Use Sources A and B and your own knowledge to answer this question.

The Nuremberg Laws, 1935

The campaign against the Jews reached a new level with the Nuremberg Laws, which were announced at the annual party rally at Nuremberg in September 1935. The main purpose of these laws was to isolate the Jews as a separate group in German society. The first forbade marriage between Germans and Jews, and the second deprived all German Jews of their citizenship. In a subsequent law, passed 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.'³



The Nuremberg Laws

The persecution increases

During the Olympic Games held in Berlin in the summer of 1936, 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 regime wanted to present the best possible face to the outside world, to counter the growing level of international complaint. The Nazis even 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,



Jewish passport from Nazi Germany, 1939, stamped with a large 'J' on the left side to identify the holder, Max Reinhold, as Jewish



German boys read an issue of *Der Stürmer* newspaper, posted in a display box at the entrance to a Nazi party headquarters in the Dresden region. The German slogan (partially obscured) at the bottom of the display box reads, 'The Jews are our misfortune'.

and many were seized as the government 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 September 1938 required Jews to add 'Israel' (for men) and 'Sarah' (for women) to their middle names. Jews were banned from public parks and swimming pools, and signs began to appear in shops and towns saying 'Jews are not wanted here' and 'The Jews are our misfortune'.

THE NUREMBERG LAWS

SOURCE STUDY

SOURCE A: The *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.

SOURCE B: The *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.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, pp. 463–65.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the purpose of each of the clauses of the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour* (the Nuremberg Laws of 1935).
- 2 Explain the purpose of the *Reich Citizenship Law* of 1935.

Another source of constant anti-Semitic attack was the publication *Der Stürmer*, put out each week by the Nazi sadist and pornographer Julius Streicher. Each edition featured graphic drawings and was full of sensational stories, many with sexual undertones. Its circulation in the 1930s was more than 700 000. Hitler himself enjoyed *Der Stürmer*, and admitted that it was the only newspaper he read from cover to cover.

In 1938 *Der Stürmer* produced a school reading book for children, entitled *The Poisonous Mushroom*.

THE POISONOUS MUSHROOM

SOURCE A: 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!'

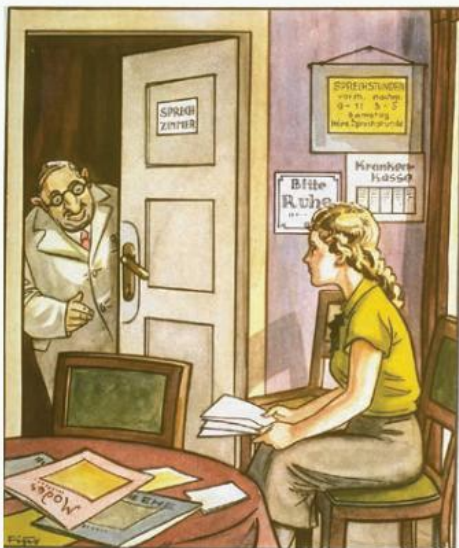
After entering the waiting room, Inge had an extraordinary experience. From the doctor's consulting room she could hear the sound of crying. She heard the voice of a young girl 'Doctor, doctor, leave me alone!'

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.

* The League of German Maidens

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 470.

SOURCE B: A drawing from *The Poisonous Mushroom*



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz

A drawing from the anti-Semitic German children's book *Der Giftpilz* (*The Poisonous Mushroom*). Its caption reads, 'Two criminal's eyes glow behind the glasses, a grin is playing on the fleshy lips.'

QUESTIONS

- 1 What impact were publications like *The Poisonous Mushroom* intended to have on German children?
- 2 How would cartoons such as these be useful for a historian studying Nazi racial policies? What are some of their limitations?

The intensive propaganda campaign against the Jews through the Propaganda Ministry and in publications such as *Der Stürmer* was intended to influence the attitudes of average German citizens towards the Jewish people. Historical research suggests that it worked, and the constant propaganda onslaught led to a great number of Germans accepting the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In a book entitled *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), the historian Daniel Goldhagen has taken an extreme position on German anti-Semitism, arguing that many German people were intolerant of the Jews and accepted the brutal treatment that the Nazis imposed. Goldhagen has suggested that the discrimination and exclusion policy that removed Jews from virtually all spheres of social, economic and cultural life by 1939 had turned the Jews into 'socially dead beings'. His book generated significant controversy when it appeared in 1996.

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*, or 'The Night of Broken Glass' (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. Across the country more than 1000 Jewish **synagogues** were attacked, and more than 7000 Jewish shops and businesses were looted. The official death toll was 91, but the real figure, including suicide, was probably closer to 1000. Over the next few days the Nazis rounded up more than 20 000 Jewish men and boys and placed them in concentration camps. The Jewish community was made to pay 30 million reichsmarks for the cost of the destruction, as well as a fine of 1 billion reichsmarks.

Kristallnacht was initiated by Goebbels and other Nazi leaders to please Hitler. Hitler himself made no public statement about the event. It was, in this sense, an example of the concept of 'moving towards the Führer' – Nazi officials interpreting the will of the Führer and carrying out radical initiatives that he most certainly approved of.



People looking at a Jewish shop in Berlin that had been plundered during *Kristallnacht* on 9–10 November 1938



Kristallnacht

KRISTALLNACHT

SOURCE A: Message from the Secret State Police Office Department II to all Regional and Local Commanders

Berlin November 9, 1938 Telex No. 234404

This telex must be delivered at once in the fastest possible manner.

- 1 Operations against Jews, in particular against their synagogues, will commence very soon throughout Germany. There must be no interference, arrangements should be made, in consultation with the General Police, to prevent looting ...
- 2 Preparations must be made for the arrest of from 20 000 to 30 000 Jews within the Reich. In particular affluent Jews are to be selected. Further directives will be forthcoming during the night.
- 3 Should Jews be found in possession of weapons during the impending operation, the most severe measures must be taken.

Gestapo II Müller

This text is classified SECRET.

Reimund Schnabel, *Macht ohne Moral. Eine Dokumentation über die SS*,
Roederberg Publishing, Frankfurt, 1957, p. 78.

SOURCE B: Goebbels explains *Kristallnacht*, November 1938

It is obvious that a nation of eighty million will not continue, silently and defencelessly, to put up with such provocations. The German people ... quite naturally took reprisal against the Jews in Germany. This explains the sudden explosion of the people's anger on the night of November 9–10, and shows that the patience of the German people is now completely exhausted ... It was neither organised nor prepared, but erupted spontaneously from the nation.

Völkischer Beobachter, 12 November 1938.

SOURCE C: From the historian Volker Ullrich

The night of 9–10 November 1938 was a complete shock for Jews still living in Germany ... All of a sudden a pogrom had made Jews realize that they were without legal protection of any kind. They could be beaten, robbed and killed without the custodians of law and order lifting a finger ... A line had been crossed: Germany had left the community of civilized nations ... Nowhere was there vocal public protest, not even from within the Churches. That being the case Hitler and his henchmen could consider *Kristallnacht* a success. They had unleashed anti-Semitic violence against the Reich's Jewish minority without encountering any resistance ... the Nationalist Socialist now knew that they could do whatever they wanted to Jews, and no one would stop them.

Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Ascent 1889–1939*, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 2016, p. 676.

QUESTIONS

- 1 In what way does the historical evidence in Source A support or contradict the evidence in Source B?
- 2 Explain why Goebbels would seek to present *Kristallnacht* to the German people in the manner he did.
- 3 What are the three main points Ullrich is making about *Kristallnacht* in Source C?
- 4 Why was *Kristallnacht* an important turning point in the pre-war treatment of the Jews in Germany? Use Sources A–C and your own knowledge to answer this question.

FROM THE DIARY OF VICTOR KLEMPERER

Victor Klemperer (1881–1960) was a German Jew and Professor of Romance Languages at Dresden Technical College until his dismissal under the laws that forbade Jews to work in education. He and his wife both survived the war. Klemperer's diaries offer a remarkable insight into life in Nazi Germany.

1938 6th December, Tuesday

The healthy sense of justice of every German manifested itself yesterday in a decree from Police Minister Himmler with immediate effect: Withdrawal of driving licenses from all Jews. Justification: Jews are unreliable, are therefore not allowed to sit at the wheel, also their being permitted to drive offends the German traffic community, especially as they have presumptuously made use of the Reich motorways built by German workers' hands. This prohibition hits us terribly hard. It is now three years exactly since I learned to drive, my driving license is dated 26.1.36 ... our spirits have now sunk even further and since new Jewish laws come out nearly every – no, really every day, our nerves have gone to the dogs.

Victor Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness: The Dairies of Victor Klemperer 1933–1941*, London, 1998, p. 340.

QUESTION

- 1 How would Klemperer's diary entries be useful to a historian studying the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany in the late 1930s? In your answer, consider the type of source, its perspective and the information it provides.

The Jewish community in the 1930s

Timeline: Vilification to discrimination

April 1933

- ◆ Boycott of Jewish businesses throughout the Reich.
- ◆ The *Law Against the Overcrowding of German Schools* removed many Jewish children from schools. All Jews were finally expelled from German schools in 1938.
- ◆ The *Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service* began the removal of Jews from positions in the government.
- ◆ An 'Aryans only' policy was adopted in German sporting clubs.

September 1933

- ◆ The Reich Chamber of Culture was established. Jews were gradually excluded from the cultural life of the nation.

May 1935

- ◆ The Military Service Act made 'Aryan descent' a prerequisite for military service.

September 1935

- ◆ The Nuremberg Laws were announced: the *Reich Citizenship Law* and the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honour*.
- ◆ The first decrees under the Nuremberg Laws removed the right of German Jews to hold German citizenship or to marry Germans of non-Jewish background.



August 1936

- ◆ The Olympic Games in Berlin. Anti-Semitic activity was deliberately reduced for the duration of the Games.

June 1937

- ◆ Secret directives from SS leader Heydrich provided for 'protective custody' for all 'defilers of race'.

April 1938

- ◆ The process of excluding Jews from economic life began. All Jewish wealth exceeding 5000 marks had to be registered.

June 1938

- ◆ In the 'June Action' 1500 Jews with any police record (including traffic violations) were arrested and sent to concentration camps.

July 1938

- ◆ All Jewish doctors were removed from the medical register.

August 1938

- ◆ All Jewish businesses had to be registered.

September 1938

- ◆ All Jewish lawyers were deprived of their right to work.
- ◆ All Jews were required to add the names 'Sarah' or 'Israel' to their names.

October 1938

- ◆ All Jews were required to have the letter 'J' stamped in red in their passports.

November 1938

- ◆ *Kristallnacht*: the destruction of Jewish synagogues and property across much of Germany. Twenty thousand 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).
- ◆ New regulations excluded Jews from theatres, concert halls, cinemas, parks, swimming pools, restaurants and holiday resorts. Jewish children were totally excluded from German schools. Restrictions were placed on Jewish ownership of pets.
- ◆ Jews were required to surrender their driver's licence and they were not permitted to travel in certain zones of major cities.

December 1938

- ◆ The takeover or 'Aryanisation' of all Jewish businesses began.

September 1939

- ◆ The outbreak of World War II.
- ◆ Jews were forbidden to appear outdoors after 8 pm.
- ◆ Jews were forbidden to own wireless sets.

The steps taken against the Jews within Germany were in a sense haphazard – boycotts and propaganda aimed at increasing feelings of hatred towards the Jews. However, the events of *Kristallnacht* in 1938 marked the end of that phase. *Kristallnacht* represented systematic and planned violence, and marked the increasing radicalisation of anti-Semitic actions, which in time would lead to the death camps during the war.

Until the outbreak of war the Nazis had encouraged a policy of forced emigration for Jews, although many nations were not prepared to accept large numbers of Jewish refugees from Germany. The newly created Reich Central Office for Jewish Emigration managed this movement of Jews. One of the main figures who ran this agency was Adolf Eichmann. Many Jews who had the wealth or means had already left Germany voluntarily, including the world-famous scientist Albert Einstein.

Before the war came and emigration (forced or voluntary) became impossible, almost 257 000 Jews had already left Germany, mainly for Palestine, the United States, Latin America or the eastern European states. Many of those who moved to the countries of eastern Europe (such as Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary) would later fall victim to the Nazis when the war began. Those who remained would face the true horror of the Holocaust.



Jewish child refugees from Germany and Austria arrive at Liverpool Street Station, London 1938

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE NAZIS

- ◆ In the democratic and tolerant Weimar Republic, anti-Semitism had been declining as an increasing number of Jews gained prominence, particularly in the economic and cultural life of the nation.
- ◆ Anti-Semitism had always been a major and consistent part of Nazi Party policy.
- ◆ Once the Nazis came to power in 1933, German Jews were vilified and progressively discriminated against.
- ◆ In 1935 the Nuremberg Laws deprived Jews of German citizenship and made it illegal for a German citizen to marry a Jew.
- ◆ The Propaganda Ministry, under Dr Goebbels, produced a constant stream of anti-Semitic material that aimed to sway German feeling and opinion against the Jews.
- ◆ The events of *Kristallnacht* in 1938 were a significant step in the radicalisation of policy against Jews in Germany.

- 1 Place the following events in chronological order.
 The Nuremberg Laws
 Aryanisation of Jewish businesses
 One-day boycott of Jewish businesses and shops
 The release in Germany of the anti-Semitic films *Jud Süß* and *The Eternal Jew*
Kristallnacht
- 2 How and why did the Nazi treatment of Jews change between 1933 and 1939?
- 3 How did Nazi racial policies affect the daily lives of Jews up to 1939? In your answer, consider the impact on employment, school and education, and their involvement in German society.
- 4 Finding out: The image below is of the passenger liner MS *St. Louis* of the Hamburg-Amerika Line. What happened to the Jews who left Germany on this ship in 1939?



United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Julie Klein

Picture postcard of the MS *St. Louis*

- 5 More than half of the Jewish population emigrated from Germany between 1933 and 1939. However, over 200 000 remained. In pairs, develop a list of the main reasons why some Jews stayed in Germany.

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Prepare an extended paragraph in which you explain the role played by either Joseph Goebbels or Heinrich Himmler in the Nazi state after 1933.
- 2 Account for the changing nature of the Nazis' policies towards Jews from 1933 to 1939.

Endnotes

- 1 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim translation, Hutchinson, London, 1969, p. 269.
- 2 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, p. 277.
- 3 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 463.

LOOKING BACK

- 1 Account for the improvement in the German economy from 1933.
- 2 It could be argued that the Nazi state after 1933 used two different methods to maintain control: persuasion and pressure. Using these two words as your headings, prepare examples of both methods, as well as a summary of the way they operated in the Nazi state.
- 3 Select one of the following topics and prepare a detailed response describing the impact the policies of the Nazi regime had on it.
 - A education
 - B youth
 - C women
 - D religion
- 4 Construct a class timeline. Allocate each person a year from 1933 to 1939. On an A4 sheet, write important events that occurred, policies that applied and short quotes. Stick on some supporting visual sources, such as photos, propaganda posters, and drawings.



Bridgeman Images/Photo © T. A. Lander

Children singing for Hitler after the German takeover of Austria in March 1938.

Nazi foreign policy and the path to war

CHAPTER 11

THE PATH TO WAR

CHAPTER 12

CONFLICT IN EUROPE 1939–1945

The path to war

11.1

NAZI FOREIGN POLICY: AIMS AND THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY

11.2

GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN ACTION 1933–1939

11.3

HISTORICAL DEBATES: THE CAUSES OF WORLD WAR II

Hitler with his architect Albert Speer (left) and sculptor Arno Breker (right) during a brief visit to Paris on 23 June 1940 after the defeat of France. It was Hitler's first and only visit to the French capital.



Bridgeman Images/Photo © Everett Collection

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

appeasement

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

Grossdeutschland

Greater Germany. Hitler believed in the idea of a greater Germany and wanted to bring all German-speaking peoples back into the Reich.

Maginot Line

A massive line of fortification built by the French along the French–German

border between 1929 and 1934, named after the Minister of War, André Maginot.

Polish Corridor

An area of eastern Germany given to Poland as part of the Paris peace settlement of 1919. The aim was to give Poland access to the Baltic Sea.

sanctions

Restrictions imposed on a country that has taken an action (usually a military action) that is unacceptable to the international community.

Most sanctions imposed by the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s took the form of economic sanctions.

Sudetenland

A region in the western part of Czechoslovakia, adjoining Germany, that was mostly inhabited by Germans who had once been part of the old Austro–Hungarian Empire. Hitler demanded the return of the Sudetenland to Germany in 1938.

The path to war

1933 MARCH

A secret Air Ministry began operation under the control of Hermann Göring.

OCTOBER

Germany left the League of Nations.

1934 JANUARY

The Polish–German Non-Aggression Pact was signed.

AUGUST

The death of President von Hindenburg. Hitler became commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

OCTOBER

Hitler authorised increases in the size of the German army.

1935 MARCH

Germany introduced conscription for the army.

OCTOBER

Italy invaded the African state of Abyssinia.

1936 MARCH

German troops re-occupied the Rhineland.

JULY

The Spanish Civil War began. German and Italian troops entered Spain to assist General Franco.

OCTOBER

A German–Italian treaty initiated the Rome–Berlin axis.

1937 MAY

Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister of Britain.

NOVEMBER

The Hossbach Memorandum.

1938 MARCH

The *Anschluss*. Germany incorporated Austria into the Reich.

SEPTEMBER

The Munich Conference.

1939 MARCH

Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia. Britain and France gave guarantees to Poland.

AUGUST

The Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact was signed.

1 SEPTEMBER

Germany invaded Poland.

3 SEPTEMBER

Britain and France declared war on Germany.

TIMELINE

11.1

NAZI FOREIGN POLICY: AIMS AND THE INFLUENCE OF IDEOLOGY

The importance of foreign policy

In the years immediately after he came to power in 1933, Hitler concentrated his efforts on securing his power base within Germany. By 1935 this had been achieved in the following ways.

- ◆ Political opposition had been eliminated.
- ◆ Hitler was both head of state and head of the government.
- ◆ The police state had become a reality.
- ◆ The threat from the SA had been eliminated.
- ◆ The German army had taken an oath of loyalty to Hitler himself, who was now their commander-in-chief.
- ◆ The economy was recovering rapidly and a policy of rearmament had begun.

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, achieved in 1933. Then there was the struggle to establish the Nazi state and to secure the party in power. By 1935, this too was a reality. Now 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.

With little interest in domestic policy or the day-to-day functioning of government, foreign policy became Hitler's dominant concern, and there is no doubt that in matters of foreign policy the initiatives and decisions were made by Hitler himself. 'Foreign policy,' said Hermann Göring at his trial in 1945, 'was the Führer's very own realm.'¹ No historians have doubted it. 'The fact remains,' wrote German-born historian Gerhard Weinberg, 'that the broad lines of policy were determined in all cases by Hitler himself ... on major issues of policy the Führer went his own way.'²

The objectives Hitler set for German foreign policy had been formulated long before he came to power. They had been shaped by his lonely years in Vienna and, in particular, by the impact of war and Germany's defeat and humiliation in 1918.

Hitler expressed his views on Germany's future role as early as 1924, in *Mein Kampf*, and what is remarkable is that what he wrote in 1924 was in large measure the policy he sought to carry out in the 1930s. *Mein Kampf* is an important source for understanding Hitler's thinking on Germany's future foreign policy. 'His policy of aggression,' writes British military historian Antony Beevor, 'was stated clearly on the very first page.'³

At the heart of Hitler's foreign policy beliefs was his determination to restore Germany to the position of a great power. Hitler saw history as the struggle of people and nations for self-preservation, and in the course of this struggle the weak perish at the hands of the strong. Hitler believed that it was his historic mission to save the German people from this fate. Just as force was a feature of human life, force and aggressive action by nations were also necessary. In *Mein Kampf* he wrote '... man has become great through perpetual struggle. In perpetual peace his greatness must decline.'⁴



Nazi foreign policy

Recovery of the will

Hitler's foreign policy was both racial and national because it involved the restoration of German national greatness and the deliberate expansion of Germany at the expense of 'inferior' peoples. When Hitler formulated his ideas in the 1920s, Germany was demoralised. Hitler did not attribute

this to the country's military defeat in 1918; rather, he believed the Germans had lost the war because they had become demoralised. The first task was to eliminate the elements that had caused the demoralisation, and to reanimate the German people by 'the recovery of the inner unity of our people's will'.⁵ To recover this 'inner unity' the nation had to be purified and inspired. To achieve its future foreign policy goals, the nation had to be prepared, with a united will and sense of purpose. This was the aim of the process of *Gleichschaltung* (the process of coordination) after 1933. Democracy was replaced by a one-party state subject to the will of the leader, most organisations were brought under the control of the state, Jewish influences were eliminated, and economic recovery and rearmament gave the nation the power to influence events.

The conquest of living space (*Lebensraum*)

Hitler believed that if the German people were to survive and preserve their racial identity they would have to acquire new territory, and this could be done only by force. He rejected the idea of seeking territory in the form of overseas colonies, which had been Germany's mistake before World War I when it had challenged the power of the British Empire. Hitler believed that Germany's destiny lay in the vast lands of eastern Europe. The ultimate aim of Nazi foreign policy was to acquire territory in eastern Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union. This productive land to the east was to be Germany's *Lebensraum*, or living space.

Hitler's ideas of race and struggle formed a central part of his vision of Germany's future policy. Living space, which Hitler saw as usable land, had to be won. In the struggle for existence, the strong take from the weak. In eastern Europe the main racial group was the Slavs, who Hitler saw as inferior people (*Untermenschen*, or subhumans), incapable of creating civilisations or states of their own. It was the task of this racially pure and restored Germany to conquer and control eastern Europe. This vast area, rich in resources, would ensure the survival of the dominant German race, the master race (*Herrenvolk*), which would subjugate the Slavs and other inferior races. This greater Reich, economically self-sufficient and militarily impregnable, would dominate Europe and last for a thousand years.

HITLER AND FOREIGN POLICY

SOURCE A: From Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (1924)

We National Socialists must hold unflinchingly to our aim in foreign policy, namely to secure for the German people the land and soil to which they are entitled on this earth ... 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 ...

But we National Socialists must go further. The right to possess soil can become a duty if without extension of its soil a great nation seems doomed to destruction ...

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 collapse.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Manheim Translation, Hutchinson, London, 1969, pp. 596–98.

SOURCE B: From the British historian Antony Beevor

Hitler was not interested merely in reoccupying the territory lost by Germany after the Versailles Treaty. He despised such a half-hearted step ... He wanted the whole of central Europe and all of Russia up to the Volga River for German Lebensraum to secure Germany's self sufficiency and status as a great power ...

The 'bread-basket' of Ukraine especially attracted German interest, after the near starvation caused largely by the British blockade during the First World War. Hitler was determined to avoid the demoralization suffered by Germans in 1918, which had led to revolution and collapse. This time others would be made to starve. But one of the main purposes of his Lebensraum plan was to seize oil production in the east. Some 85 per cent of the Reich's oil supplies, even in peacetime, had to be imported, and that would be Germany's Achilles heel in war.

Eastern colonies appeared the best means to establish self-sufficiency, yet Hitler's ambition was far greater than that of other nationalists. In line with his social-Darwinist beliefs that the life of nations was a struggle for racial mastery, he wanted to reduce the Slav population dramatically in numbers through deliberate starvation and to enslave the survivors as a helot (servile or slave) class.

Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2012. p.6.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Source A was translated in 1969. When, where and why was it written?
- 2 Using Source A, explain why Hitler believed that it was essential for Germany to acquire territory in eastern Europe.
- 3 According to Source B, which particular resources does Germany need from eastern Europe?
- 4 According to Sources A and B, why does Hitler believe the Germans have the right to occupy eastern Europe?

Hitler and the Treaty of Versailles

Like most Germans, Hitler made no secret of his opposition to the Treaty of Versailles, but unlike earlier German politicians, he was able and determined to end the disgrace and reverse some of the provisions that the treaty had imposed on Germany. While Germany was prepared to accept the borders in the west, it was not prepared to accept the borders in the east.

Eastern Europe was made up of a number of new and relatively weak nations, some of which came into being after World War I. 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 had been born. Hitler, with his concept of the *Volk*, sought to unite all Germans into a greater Germany (**Grossdeutschland**). In his ultimate quest to win German living space in the east, Hitler would have to deal with the states in eastern Europe that lay between the Reich and Russia.



Europe of the 1930s, showing the areas affected by Germany's foreign policy actions

Nazism as a doctrine of force

A final factor that added to European tensions after 1933 was the nature of Nazism itself. The idea of conflict was part of Nazi doctrine, and violence was part of its make-up. It is difficult to accept that Hitler ever aimed to preserve peace in Europe. He had a long-term vision that he saw as absolutely essential to the survival of the German race. He led a movement that believed in violence. He believed in the idea of struggle between nations and war as a necessity, and the natural result of this struggle. It may have been possible to win some territory in Europe through threats or diplomacy, but in the end, whether in the West or against Russia, Hitler's policies made a European conflict inevitable.

HUGH TREVOR-ROPER ON HITLER'S FOREIGN POLICY

It was a program of eastern colonisation, entailing a war of conquest against Russia. If it were successfully carried out, it would leave Germany the dominant power in eastern Europe and able to conquer the West at will. In order to carry it out, Hitler needed a restored German army which, since it must be powerful enough to conquer Russia, must also be powerful enough to conquer the West if that should be necessary. And it might be necessary even before the attack on Russia. For in order to reach Russia, Hitler would need to send his armies through Poland and in order to do this he would need to break the bond of treaty which bound the new countries of Eastern Europe, the creatures of Versailles, with their creators Britain and France. Hitler might be able to break these bonds without a war against the West, but he could not be sure of it: it was always possible that a war with the West would be necessary before he could march against Russia. And in fact this is what happened.

The Third Reich, like the Second, was to be the work of war ... Hitler loved the thought of war. He loved his time in the German army. When that army was defeated, it was an epic tragedy and Hitler describes it with depressing rhetoric. Was it for this, he asks, that the volunteers of

1914 had set out and the German soldier endured for four years heat and snow, hardship and danger? No of course it was not. It was to impose this on other nations and that is what Hitler intended to do again, more successfully ...

Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Listener*, January 1973.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why was the army essential to Hitler's plans?
- 2 Why might invading Poland trigger war with the West?

11.1 SUMMARY

NAZI FOREIGN POLICY

- ◆ Hitler's foreign policy ideas were shaped by his belief that struggle was an essential element of both life and international relations.
- ◆ He believed that Germany had to regain its status as a great world power and the dominant power in Europe. This required rearmament.
- ◆ Germany needed the restoration of its inner strength and a strong government that would carry out a determined foreign policy.
- ◆ The restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles had to be eliminated.
- ◆ Hitler believed in the idea of the *Volk* (the people), and that all Germans who had been cut off from Germany and lived in other European states had to be brought back as part of a greater Germany.
- ◆ Germany was not interested in creating an overseas empire of colonies.
- ◆ Germany's destiny was to acquire territory in eastern Europe to carve out living space (*Lebensraum*) for the German people.
- ◆ This new territory had to be won in the states of eastern Europe at the expense of Russia, which, Hitler believed, was weakened and ready for destruction because of the Jews and communism. German foreign policy also saw the need to destroy communism in Europe.

11.1 QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the role of *Lebensraum* in Nazi foreign policy.
- 2 Outline the ideological basis of Nazi foreign policy.
- 3 Assess the usefulness of the extract from either Hugh Trevor-Roper or Antony Beevor to a historian studying Nazi foreign policy. In your answer, focus on the nature of the source and what it tells you about Nazi foreign policy.

11.2

GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY IN ACTION 1933–1939

The danger of France

Although Hitler looked to the east, he also had to come to terms with the great powers of the West, Britain and France. Hitler came to see Britain as Germany's natural ally in the west. He had no plan to challenge Britain's naval supremacy or its world empire, and he hoped that Britain might be prepared to concede German supremacy in Europe. He also believed that the ultimate destruction of Soviet Russia would be to Britain's advantage.

France was another matter. Germany had just begun the process of rearmament, and until it was militarily strong Hitler believed that the French might take the opportunity to wage a preventative war against Germany. 'If France has any real statesmen,' he told his generals in February 1933, 'she will set about us during the preparatory period.'⁶ France, more than any other of the Allies, had been responsible for the severity of the Treaty of Versailles. France had reasserted its authority during the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923, and with a large standing army on Germany's western border there was always the danger that they might do it again before Germany was militarily able to resist.

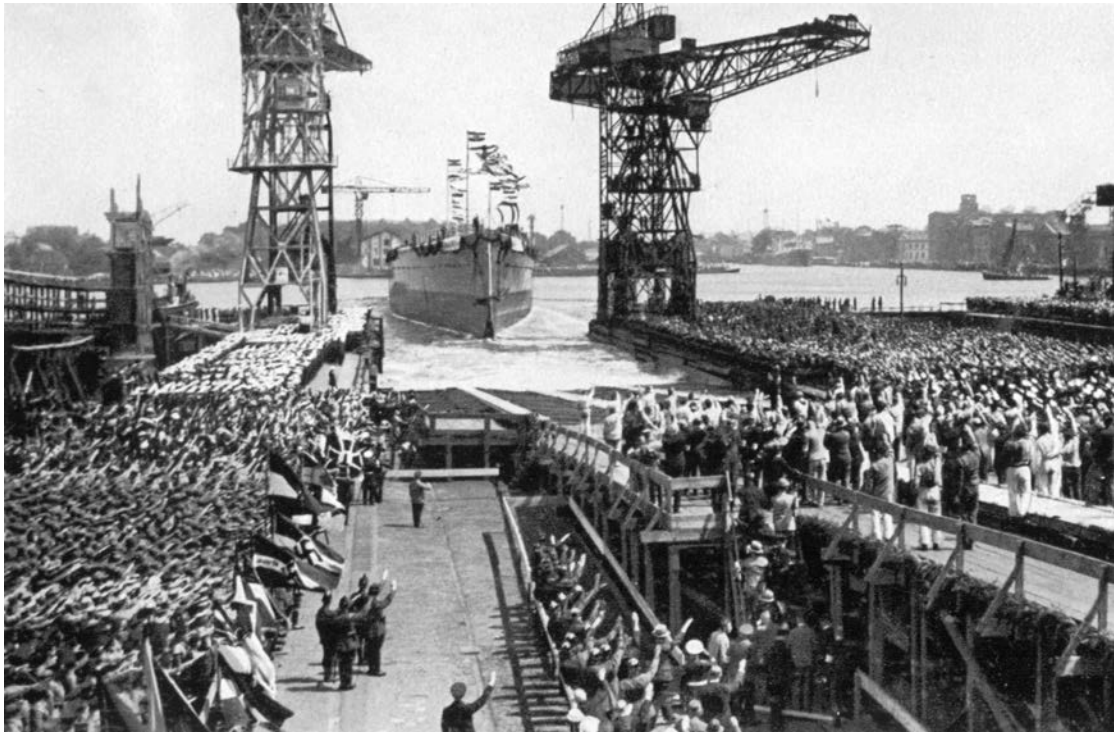
A cautious policy

Hitler's early steps in foreign policy reflect a good deal of caution. This is not surprising – rearmament and Germany's economic recovery were only beginning, and the regime was still establishing its totalitarian rule within Germany.

In October 1933 Hitler took his first foreign policy move when Germany withdrew from both the League of Nations and the World Disarmament Conference. The move to leave the League, which had always been associated with the Treaty of Versailles, was popular in Germany. During these early years Hitler spoke often of his desire for peace, and it was in this spirit that he approved the signing of a Non-Aggression Pact with Poland in early 1934. The treaty came as a surprise to Britain and France, given that Poland had territory in the Polish Corridor that had been taken from Germany after 1918. The treaty with Poland is a good example of the deceptiveness of Nazi foreign policy. Poland, of course, lay in the path of future German expansion to the east, and would be dealt with in the long term. However, until Germany was in a position to take Poland, which it did in 1939, a non-aggression pact was of considerable political and propaganda value.

Rearmament announced, 1935

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 grow the army to 500 000 men. Hitler intended to ignore the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. The Western powers, Britain and France, took no action.



Alamy Stock Photo/INTER 070

As part of the rebuilding of the German navy, the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* was launched in 1934.

Anglo-German Naval Treaty

In June 1935 Germany took another foreign policy step when it signed a naval treaty with Britain. Germany had made it clear that it intended to rearm, and the British were anxious to avoid another naval race, as had happened before World War I. The Anglo-German Naval Treaty, as it became known, also suited Germany, for it virtually meant the end of the military clauses of the Treaty of Versailles. Under the terms of the treaty with Britain, the German navy was not to exceed 35 per cent of the size of the British Royal Navy, and the British would withdraw their naval forces from the Baltic Sea. The treaty was welcomed in Britain, and many hoped it would lead to better relations between the two countries. Although Germany ultimately ignored the treaty, in the short term it served its purpose as a positive example (like the Non-Aggression Pact with Poland the year before) of Germany's peaceful intent.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland, 1936

By 1936 Hitler felt that the time had come to test the resolve of the French. In March 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. There was also another reason for this military action. By 1935, with conscription in place and rearmament underway, the German military presence in the Rhineland meant that the Ruhr, the industrial heart of German iron and steel production, could be better defended against the French.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland was a huge gamble. Hitler moved against the advice of his generals and in the knowledge that France had vastly superior forces if they chose to resist the Germans. Although Germany was breaking the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaty of 1925, the French and the British took no action.

Throughout his career Hitler had shown great skill for exploiting opportunities. The reoccupation of the Rhineland was another good example. The Anglo–German Naval Treaty the year before had made Britain less inclined to act against Germany, and indeed the treaty had strained relations between Britain and France. In addition, the French government had fallen, and when the occupation took place in March France was governed by a provisional caretaker government – another opportunity that Hitler did not miss.

The reoccupation of the Rhineland was also an important turning point. The Western democracies had given way in the face of German action, and the Western policy of **appeasement** was taking shape. If Britain and France had stood up to Hitler in this first test of nerve, it is possible that the future war may well have been prevented. It was, said British historian AJP Taylor, ‘the last chance, the last occasion when Germany could have been stopped with all the suffering and sacrifice of a great war’.⁷ The gamble paid off for Hitler, and the Rhineland was a significant victory. French and British weakness was revealed. ‘Anyone other than myself,’ Hitler later observed, ‘would have lost his nerve. What saved us was my unshakeable obstinacy and my amazing aplomb.’⁸ He later admitted that ‘If the French had marched into the Rhineland we would have had to withdraw with our tails between our legs’.⁹

The reoccupation of the Rhineland convinced Hitler that France, with its defensive policy behind the **Maginot Line**, was no longer a danger to Germany’s western border. France had been tested, and had failed to respond.

A demilitarised Rhineland had left Germany and its industrial heartland vulnerable to a French attack, and had also made it almost impossible for Germany to launch any type of offensive against France on the western front. Both of these elements were now gone, and in fact Hitler attacked France just four years later, in 1940.

The Rhineland reoccupation proved to Hitler that the Western powers feared the thought of war. He was prepared to exploit this fear to gain the advantage.

From 1936 the early caution in German foreign policy began to give way to a more daring approach. 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. The caution of the earlier years had given Germany time to rebuild. Now Hitler was moving to reverse the order, using Germany’s increasing military strength, and the threat of using it, to begin a more aggressive phase of his foreign policy. After the success in the Rhineland, Hitler’s confidence was high. He grew increasingly impatient, and believed the time had come to turn his focus to the area Germany was destined to go: to the east.



Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo

German troops re-enter the Rhineland over the Rhine bridge at Mainz on 7 March 1936

THE OCCUPATION OF THE RHINELAND

SOURCE A: Norman Rich on the Rhineland

The Rhineland was one of the boldest and most momentous gambles of his [Hitler's] career. For with this move he destroyed at one blow the major strategic advantage the Allies had gained as a result of their victory in the First World War ... Hitler's action affected France most immediately for it meant in the event of another conflict German forces would be poised directly on the French border ... German generals warned Hitler in the most pressing manner not to risk a move that was certain to provoke a French invasion. But Hitler disregarded all voices of caution ... his confidence in his judgment was better than that of his military experts.

Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1973, p. 86.

SOURCE B: A cartoon by David Low, 1936



David Low, 'Stepping Stones to Glory', *Evening Standard*, 8 July 1936

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why the occupation of the Rhineland was 'one of the boldest and most momentous gambles' of Hitler's career.
- 2 How did the occupation of the Rhineland affect France militarily and politically?
- 3 According to Source A, how do the German generals feel about Hitler's plans?
- 4 What effect do you think the occupation of the Rhineland had on Hitler himself?
- 5 What is the main point being made in the cartoon by David Low (Source B)?
- 6 Explain why he called the cartoon 'Stepping Stones to Glory'.
- 7 How could 'Stepping Stones to Glory' be useful to a historian? Do you think everyone in England thought the same way that Low did?
- 8 Research: David Low drew a number of famous cartoons about Nazi Germany. Find some of these cartoons and explain why you think his work was banned in Germany.

Germany and Italy: a new alliance

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler had presented Italy as a natural ally of Germany, and by 1936 this relationship was taking shape. A year earlier Italy had invaded the North African state of Abyssinia, and the League of Nations had sought to solve the problem by imposing economic **sanctions** against Italy. The sanctions failed, but they had the effect of pushing the Italians closer to Germany. In 1936 both Germany and Italy sent forces to fight in the Spanish Civil War in support of General Franco. The bond between Italy and Germany strengthened in September 1937 when Italian dictator Mussolini made a visit to Germany. The following May Hitler made a state visit to Italy. What became known as the 'Rome–Berlin axis' had evolved.



A German woman reads a copy of the *Berliner Illustrierte* newspaper, featuring photographs of Mussolini's official visit to Berlin in September 1937 that has been posted on a wall in Berlin.

The Hossbach Memorandum, November 1937

On 5 November 1937 Hitler called a meeting of his military leaders at his Chancellery in Berlin. The record of what was said at the meeting was kept by Hitler's adjutant, Colonel Hossbach, and is known as the Hossbach Memorandum.

Most historians regard what was said at this meeting as evidence that Hitler was moving to a new phase of his foreign policy. Encouraged by his past foreign policy success, and with the pace of rearmament increasing, Hitler told his military leaders that the time had come to solve the question of living space for the German people. Hitler said that it was his 'unalterable resolve to solve Germany's problem of space at the latest by 1943–1945', because after that date the advantage of German rearmament would be reduced by obsolescence (weaponry becoming out of date). The Hossbach Memorandum gives clear evidence that Hitler was now thinking of taking territory in eastern Europe by force, and that a new urgency had entered the argument. The meeting made it clear that one of the future objectives of German policy, when the situation permitted it, was to incorporate German-speaking Austria into the Reich and to overthrow the state of Czechoslovakia. These were to be the preliminaries for the greater tasks that lay ahead.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE CONFERENCE IN THE REICH CHANCELLERY, BERLIN, 5 NOVEMBER 1937

From 4.15 to 8.30 p.m.

Present:

The Führer and Chancellor, Field Marshal von Blomberg, War Minister, Colonel General von Fritsch, C in C Army, Admiral Raeder, C in C Navy, Colonel General Göring, C in C Luftwaffe, Baron von Neurath, Foreign Minister, Colonel Hossbach

... The Führer then continued: The aim of German policy was to make secure and to preserve the racial community and to enlarge it. It was therefore a question of space ... Germany's problems could

only be solved by means of force and this was never without attendant risk ... The equipment of the army, navy and Luftwaffe, as well as the formation of the officer corps, was nearly complete. Equipment and armaments were modern, in further delay there lay the danger of their obsolescence ... It was while the rest of the world was still preparing its defences that we were obliged to take the offensive. No one knew today what the situation would be in the years 1943–1945. Only one thing was certain, that we could not wait longer ...

The Führer believed that almost certainly Britain, and probably France as well, had already written off the Czechs ... It would of course be necessary to maintain a strong defence on our western frontier during the prosecution of our attack on the Czechs and Austria. And in this connection it had to be remembered that the defence measures of the Czechs were growing in strength from year to year and that the actual worth of the Austrian army was also increasing ... the incorporation of these two states within Germany meant, from the politico-military point of view, a substantial advantage ... In reply to considerations offered by Field Marshal von Blomberg and General von Fritsch regarding the attitude of Britain and France, the Führer repeated his previous statements that he was convinced of Britain's non-participation, and therefore he did not believe in the probability of belligerent [warlike] action by France against Germany.

Hossbach

Certified correct, Berlin, 10 November 1937

Documents on German Foreign Policy, Series D, vol. 1, Washington, 1949, pp. 29–39.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify the main points that Hitler was making in this conference.
- 2 Did Hitler believe that these actions would result in war?
- 3 How would this source be useful to a historian? In your answer you should consider how the nature of the source impacts on its reliability, and how its content would be useful.

The *Anschluss*, March 1938

Hitler had always intended to unite the country of his birth with the country he now led, but a union, or *Anschluss*, between the two countries had been forbidden under the 1919 peace settlement. Within Austria a strong Austrian Nazi Party, led by Konrad Seyss-Inquart, had operated for a number of years. Members of the party pressured for *Anschluss* between Austria and the dynamic and progressive Germany across the border.

The diplomatic events that led to the *Anschluss* were begun not by Hitler but by the Austrian chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg. In early March 1938 Schuschnigg visited Hitler at his home at Berchtesgaden near the Austrian border. Hitler, who was a skilful opportunist, used the meeting to threaten and pressure the Austrian leader. He demanded that Seyss-Inquart and two other pro-Nazis be made members of the Austrian government, and that steps be taken to link the Austrian economy more closely to that of Germany.

Schuschnigg resisted the demands and, finding a measure of confidence, made the mistake of trying to defy Hitler. On 9 March he announced a plebiscite (referendum) in which Austrians would be asked whether they wanted union with Germany. Hitler responded with fury. Intense diplomatic pressure and renewed threats of force came from Berlin, and within two days Schuschnigg was forced to call off the plebiscite and resign. Hitler then increased the pressure on the Austrians and demanded that Seyss-Inquart be appointed chancellor. On 12 March the Austrian president,

Wilhelm Miklas, bowing to pressure and the threat of invasion, appointed Seyss-Inquart as Austrian chancellor. Seyss-Inquart already had instructions from Göring that he was to call for German military intervention to 'restore order', and a few hours later German troops crossed the border into Austria unopposed.

Hitler was sure that the Western powers would not intervene, and Italy, the former defender of Austrian independence, was now supporting Germany.

Three days later, on 15 March, Hitler returned to Vienna, the city he had left as a failure in 1913, in triumph. On that same day, Austria ceased to exist as a separate European country and became part of the greater German Reich. Seyss-Inquart, chancellor for three days, resigned. The *Anschluss* had been achieved through diplomatic pressure and the threat of force. For Hitler it was another diplomatic triumph and one of the greatest moments of his life.

The night Hitler left Vienna, arrests of political opponents began, and units of the SS arrived to begin the systematic persecution of the 300 000 Jews who lived in Austria.



Street signs being changed in Vienna on 12 March 1938, after the *Anschluss*. Dollfuss Platz became Adolf Hitler Platz.



The crisis over Czechoslovakia, 1938

After the *Anschluss*, which many saw as an action to resolve a wrong of the 1919 Peace Settlement, bringing an area that had once been German back into the Reich, Hitler began work on his true goal – the removal of Czechoslovakia and then Poland from the map. Both these states were obstacles to Germany's eastward expansion in pursuit of the goal of 'living space'.

The new nation of Czechoslovakia had been formed in 1918 from the break-up of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a democracy with a modern army and good defences, a member of the League of Nations and an ally of both France and the Soviet Union.

Despite its strength as a nation, Czechoslovakia had one great weakness, which Hitler now exploited – it was a multinational state. Within its borders the majority were Czechs, but there were also a number of Slovaks, small numbers of Hungarians and Poles, and 3 million Germans who had formerly been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The German minority lived in the Sudetenland, the region jutting into Germany. Hitler had a ready-made issue to exploit, and by the middle of 1938, with German propaganda defending the rights of the Sudeten Germans, the issue quickly became an international problem. In April Hitler had issued secret orders to his army commanders to prepare for 'Case Green', a military attack on Czechoslovakia, to be ready by 1 October 1938.

Appeasement in action

The Czech government, led by President Eduard Benes, was not prepared to give up the Sudetenland, despite the fact that both the French and the British were urging them to find a solution to the problem. The British and French governments were following the policy of **appeasement** in their dealings with Germany, believing that it was still possible to settle the problems with Germany by

peaceful means. It was a perfectly understandable policy, and at the time a very popular one. It was based in part on a deep-seated horror at the thought of another war, and in part on the realisation that the Treaty of Versailles may have been too harsh on Germany. As Germany re-emerged as a powerful nation in the 1930s, many believed that Germany's grievances had to be settled. The policy of appeasement was also based on the false belief that Hitler was a reasonable politician who had limited demands.

British historian AJP Taylor has suggested – and modern scholars such as Richard Evans agree – that appeasement was the only sane and honourable course for the British and French governments to take while German intentions remained unclear or at least seemed to be confined to a revision of the Treaty of Versailles. Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of Britain after 1937 and the man most associated with the policy of appeasement, was certainly of the opinion that the 1919 treaty had been too harsh on the Germans, and that issues needed to be resolved peacefully. Chamberlain was motivated by a passionate desire to preserve the peace. 'Ever since I assumed my present office,' he told parliament in 1938, 'my main purpose has been to work for the pacification of Europe, for the removal of those suspicions and those animosities which have for so long poisoned the air.'¹⁰ The Sudeten issue was one such animosity, and Chamberlain actively wanted to get involved.



Chamberlain flies to see Hitler

On 12 September Hitler delivered a powerful speech at the Nazi Party rally at Nuremberg. He called the Sudeten Germans 'those tortured souls' and demanded that the Sudeten issue be resolved. Chamberlain shared Hitler's view, and, believing that Hitler would soon resort to force, he now took the initiative. In what was at the time a daring move, Chamberlain's solution was to fly to Germany to meet personally with Hitler. The action took Hitler by surprise, but, as on so many other occasions in his life, Hitler found himself presented with an opportunity and he knew just how to exploit it.

On 15 September 1938 Chamberlain, aged almost 70, took his first aeroplane journey, to Hitler's mountain home at Berchtesgaden. He made no preparations and with only an interpreter present, the two men discussed the Sudeten question. Hitler took the initiative and demanded that the Sudetenland must be handed over to Germany on account of its German-speaking population. Chamberlain agreed in principle, but added that the matter would have to be discussed by the British and French cabinets.

Chamberlain did not come to Berchtesgaden to negotiate from a position of strength, because the strength was not there. He hoped to find a solution to the Czech problem, to open up a better relationship with Germany, to convince Hitler that no gains could be got from war, and above all, he came to buy time.

Pressure on the Czechs

Chamberlain had come to the conclusion that Hitler was determined, and that his objectives were strictly limited. He had misread Hitler totally, and told his cabinet colleagues that he believed he had established an influence over Hitler. 'I got the impression,' he wrote, 'that here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word'.¹¹

Almost at once, the French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier arrived in London for discussions with the British, and within a day a joint Anglo–French declaration had been drawn up and dispatched to President Benes in Czechoslovakia. The declaration requested that Czechoslovakia surrender the Sudetenland to Germany. Later that day, after new pressure from the British ambassador in Prague, Czechoslovakia announced it was prepared to accept the Anglo–French plan 'with pain'.

The second meeting: Bad Godesberg

Chamberlain once again flew to Germany for a second meeting with Hitler, this time in the small town of Bad Godesberg on the Rhine. No sooner had the British Prime Minister begun his report than Hitler interrupted to make new demands. He insisted that the Sudetenland was to be occupied immediately and handed over in its present condition. All military installations, transport, and commercial and public utilities were to be left intact. Hitler gave a deadline of 1 October for this withdrawal, or 'certain military measures would be necessary'. Chamberlain, shaken at these new demands, began to see the true nature of Hitler's intent.

Preparing for war

In the days after the Bad Godesberg meeting, and despite Chamberlain's belief that peace could still be preserved, Britain and France reluctantly made preparations for war. Military talks began between the British and French, 90 000 French reservists were called up, air-raid trenches were dug in public parks, children were evacuated from London, and gas masks were issued. The Czechs had 30 well-trained divisions, while behind the Maginot Line the French had a force of 100 divisions. The threat of war was very real.

The pressure now on Hitler came to the surface in a violent speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin on 26 September. There was no backing down. Screaming abuse at President Benes of Czechoslovakia, Hitler announced his firm intention of bringing the Sudetenland into the Reich 'by peace or war' on 1 October.

On the following day, 27 September 1938, Prime Minister Chamberlain, 'wobbling all over the place' according to his secretary, broadcast to the British people. 'How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing.'¹² A few hours later the Royal Navy was mobilised.



image/folk/Mary Evans/Illustrated London News

Workers digging trenches for air-raid shelters in St James's Park, London, in 1938, when it appeared that the Czechoslovakian issue would lead to war with Germany

The breakthrough in the crisis came suddenly and from an unexpected source. The British government had asked the Italian dictator Mussolini to intercede with Hitler. Now anxious to avert a war that might involve Italy, Mussolini did so. Hitler agreed to stay his hand for 24 hours, and to meet the British and the French at a hastily arranged conference in Munich the following day.

Chamberlain received the news that Hitler was prepared to have one final conference while he was speaking to the British parliament. 'I am sure the House will release me,' he said with dramatic understatement, 'to go and see what I can make of this last effort.' The parliament broke into cheering and someone shouted, 'Thank God for the Prime Minister!'

Czechoslovakia's response to the Bad Godesberg demands, 25 September 1938

It is an ultimatum of the sort usually presented to a vanquished nation not a proposition to a state which has shown the greatest readiness to make sacrifices for the appeasement of Europe ... The proposals go far beyond what we agreed to in the so-called Anglo-French plan. They deprive us of every safeguard for our national existence. We are to yield up large proportions of our carefully prepared defences, and admit the German armies deep into our country before we have been able to organise it on the new basis or make any preparations for its defence.

My Government wish me to declare in all solemnity that Herr Hitler's demands in their present form are absolutely and unconditionally unacceptable to my Government. We rely upon the two great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial.

The Munich Conference

The difficult task of forcing Czechoslovakia to concede to the German demands came to a head at the Munich Conference on 29 September 1938, when Czechoslovakia was betrayed by the Western powers. Although France had a binding alliance with Czechoslovakia, Britain and France would not support the Czechs. Abandoned and facing the threat of German power, Czechoslovakia reluctantly agreed to hand over the disputed regions according to Hitler's demands.

The four participants of the conference were greeted with tremendous enthusiasm when they returned to their capitals. Suddenly the prospect of war had gone, and emotional relief burst out. Chamberlain returned to London and declared that it was 'peace in our time'. The policy of appeasement had triumphed, and every major newspaper in the country lauded the achievements of the prime minister. 'No conqueror returning from a victory on the battlefield has come home adorned with nobler laurels,' wrote *The Times* in its editorial. The Poet Laureate, John Masefield, expressed the same feeling:

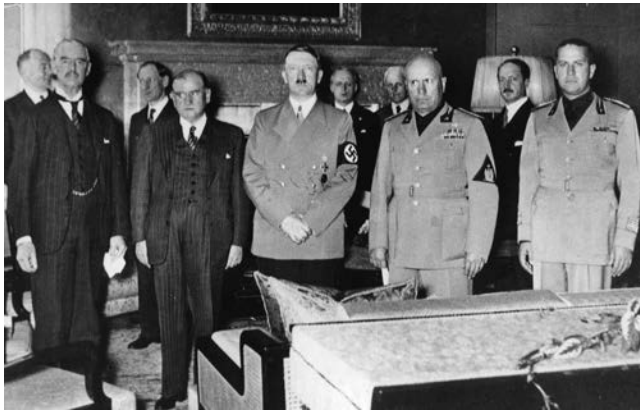
*As Priam to Achilles for his son
So you, in the night, divinely led,
To ask that young men's bodies not yet dead
Be given from the battle, not begun.*

John Masefield, *The Times*, 16 September 1938.

Of the few major politicians who questioned the Munich settlement at the time, Winston Churchill was the most articulate. 'All is over,' he told Parliament in October 1938. 'Silent, mournful, abandoned, broken. Czechoslovakia recedes into the darkness.'



Munich Conference



The Munich Conference, September 1938: Neville Chamberlain, Édouard Daladier, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini and Italian foreign minister Ciano



This Nazi propaganda postcard from 1938 shows the Sudeten area of Czechoslovakia, which was given to Germany at the Munich Conference. The caption translates as, 'We thank our leader'.

The meaning of the Munich Conference

There is no doubt that when Britain and France forced Czechoslovakia to give in to the German demands in September 1938, the peace of Europe was saved. Czechoslovakia's interests had been sacrificed for the greater good. But Britain and France also paid a price for peace in 1938. In preserving the peace, they, the victorious powers of 1918, had surrendered to Germany. Hitler was the real winner of the Czech crisis. His timing had been faultless and his position was now unassailable. His policy of eastern European expansion had begun, and by the threat of war rather than by war itself, he had begun the dismantlement of the Czech state. The Czech crisis also confirmed Hitler's opinion of the weakness of the West. 'Our enemies are worms,' he later observed. 'I saw them at Munich.'¹³

Most Western politicians knew that the peace they had achieved in 1938 probably would not last. In this sense, all the West gained was time, and although this justification for Munich was not used until appeasement had failed, the democracies made the most of the time they had gained. The pace of rearmament was rapidly increased. At the time of the Munich Conference Britain had one operational fighter squadron; when war came a year later, it had 26.

At the heart of appeasement was the desire for peace at almost any price, and a realisation that the West was not ready for war. Chamberlain spoke of the horror of waves of German bombers over London, and he knew how vulnerable Britain was with the poor state of her defences. He knew the British people overwhelmingly hoped for peace, and this was reflected in the strong pressure that was coming from the British Dominions of Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand not to get involved in war over Czechoslovakia.

The relief that war had been averted blurred the fact that the West had forced a democratic state to give in to Hitler's demands. Chamberlain called it 'peace in our time', but others, such as Winston Churchill, saw it differently. 'We have passed an awful milestone in our history ...' he said. 'And do not suppose this is the end. This is only the beginning of the reckoning.'¹⁴ British politician Harold Nicolson put it more simply: 'It's been a bad year, a foul year,' he scribbled in his diary, 'and next year will be worse.'¹⁵

The end of appeasement

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.

APPEASEMENT

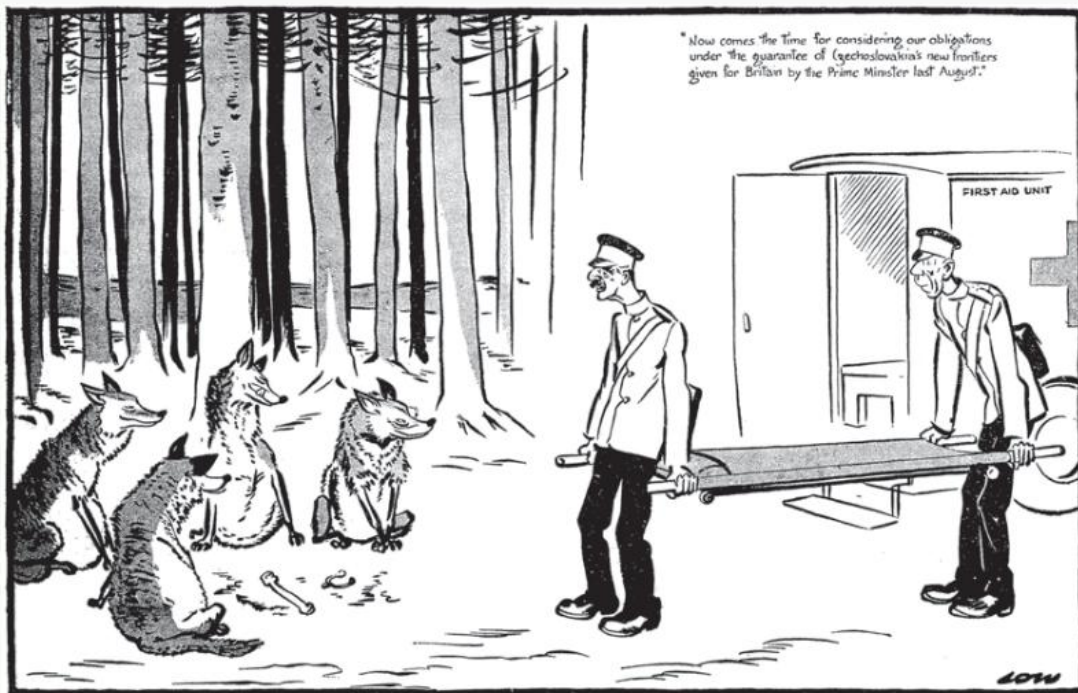
SOURCE A: Neville Chamberlain defends the policy of appeasement, January 1939

When I decided to go to Germany I never expected I was going to escape criticism; indeed I didn't go there to get popularity. I went there because of what appeared to me to be an almost desperate situation that seemed to me to offer the only hope of averting a European war ...

I have never denied that the terms ... I was able to secure at Munich were not those I myself desired, but I had to deal with no new situation. This was a problem which had existed ever since the Treaty of Versailles, a problem which should have been solved long ago... And after all, the first and most immediate object of my visit was achieved. The peace of Europe was saved: and had it not been for those visits, hundreds of thousands of families would now be in mourning for the flower of Europe's best manhood.

Neville Chamberlain, speech in Birmingham, 28 January 1939.

SOURCE B: A cartoon by David Low, 2 December 1938



David Low, 'Excuse me, but did you hear a piercing scream?', *Evening Standard*, 2 December 1938

QUESTION

- 1 Compare the attitudes to appeasement shown in Sources A and B. What are the similarities and differences?

The takeover of the rest of Czechoslovakia marked the end of appeasement. This was aggression. For the first time, a large area of Europe that was essentially non-German had been incorporated into the Reich. Appeasement as a policy had been discredited, and public opinion in Britain and France quickly swung against Germany. It was clear that Germany would now attempt to take the Polish state as it had taken the state of Czechoslovakia, so on 31 March 1939, Britain gave a guarantee to Poland. Any future German expansion in the east was no longer possible without war.

The Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact

Hitler was determined to deal with Poland in 1939. In April he ordered his generals to prepare for ‘Case White’, an attack on Poland that would begin in September 1939. 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.

Stalin was well aware that war over Poland was approaching, and Russia had no great love of the Poles. Poland had incorporated Russian territory into the Polish state in 1920. In this sense, Germany and Russia shared a common hatred of the Poles, because German territories (the Polish Corridor and the city of Danzig) were also part of the Polish state.

Although official Nazi policy had always presented the Soviet Union and communism as the enemy of the German nation, and *Mein Kampf* talked about Germany expanding eastward at the expense of the Soviet Union, it was now in Germany’s interests 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 in August 1939 secret negotiations began between Germany and the Soviet Union. The German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, flew to Moscow and on 23 August Germany and Russia signed the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact. In a secret clause of the treaty they agreed to divide Poland up between them. The ‘non-aggression pact’ was in fact an aggression pact against Poland, whose fate was sealed.



The outbreak of war, September 1939

The signing of the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact prepared the way for Germany to launch its 2-million-strong army against Poland. Hitler still did not believe that Britain and France would respond, although immediately after the signing of the pact both Britain and France had reaffirmed their commitment to Poland.

On 1 September 1939, one week after the signing of the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact, German troops crossed the Polish border. Britain and France delayed for two more days, then on 3 September 1939 they declared war on Germany. Prime Minister Chamberlain addressed the British people: ‘May God bless you all, and may He defend the right, for it is evil things we shall be fighting against, brute force, bad faith, injustice, oppression and persecution – and against them I am certain that the right will prevail.’ Two weeks later, under terms secretly agreed to in the Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact, Soviet forces invaded and occupied parts of eastern Poland.

'RENDEZVOUS'

SOURCE A: A cartoon by David Low, 20 September 1939

David Low, *Evening Standard*, 20 September 1939

QUESTIONS

- 1 What diplomatic event that had occurred a month earlier is the basis for this cartoon?
- 2 Identify the figure on the ground between Hitler and Stalin.
- 3 Why did it suit both Hitler and Stalin to sign a non-aggression pact in 1939?
- 4 Explain why the pact would have come as a surprise to the Western powers.
- 5 Based on both your understanding of Nazi Germany's attitude to Soviet Russia and on the imagery in this cartoon, what evidence can you offer to support the claim that this was not a polite and friendly greeting, and that the alliance would not last?

SOURCE B: A poem by British poet WH Auden, September 1939

*Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;*



*The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night ...
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return*

WH Auden

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the meaning of 'The unmentionable odour of death offends the September night'.
- 2 To whom is Auden referring in the line 'Those to whom evil is done'? What historical evidence can you offer to support Auden's remark?

The coming of war: Inside Hitler's Chancellery

Hitler addresses his military commanders, 22 August 1939

The destruction of Poland has priority. The aim is to eliminate active forces, not to reach a definite line. Even if war breaks out in the West, the destruction of Poland remains the priority. A quick decision in view of the season ... Close your hearts to pity. Act brutally. Eighty million people must obtain what is their right.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 3, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1983, p. 743.

The British ultimatum, 3 September 1939 (from the memoirs of Hitler's interpreter, Paul Schmidt)

I then took the ultimatum to the Chancellery ... when I entered the room Hitler was sitting at his desk and Ribbentrop stood by the window. I stood some distance from Hitler's desk and slowly translated the British government ultimatum. When I finished there was complete silence. Hitler sat immobile, gazing before him. He was not at a loss nor did he rage. He sat completely silent and unmoving. After what seemed an age he turned to Ribbentrop ... 'What now?' he asked, with a savage look, as though implying that his Foreign Minister had misled him about England's probable reaction. Ribbentrop answered quietly, 'I assume the French will hand a similar ultimatum within the hour' ... Göring turned to me and said, 'If we lose this war, then God have mercy on us.' Goebbels stood in the corner, downcast and self-absorbed.

Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, Macmillan, New York, 1950, p. 157.

THE PATH TO WAR, 1933–1939

- ◆ In October 1933 Germany left the League of Nations and the World Disarmament Conference.
- ◆ In January 1934 Germany and Poland signed a non-aggression pact.
- ◆ In July 1934 Austrian Nazis attempted to overthrow the Austrian government.
- ◆ In January 1935 the Saar Region of Germany became part of the Reich.
- ◆ In March 1935 Germany broke the Treaty of Versailles and reintroduced conscription.
- ◆ In June 1935 the Anglo–German Naval Treaty was signed. Relations between Germany and Britain improved.
- ◆ In March 1936 Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaty by moving troops into the demilitarised Rhineland.
- ◆ In September 1936 Germany introduced the Four-Year Plan.
- ◆ In October 1936 Mussolini proclaimed the existence of the Rome–Berlin axis.
- ◆ In November 1937 Hitler told his military leaders that the time had come to solve Germany's 'living space' problem (the Hossbach Memorandum).
- ◆ In March 1938 the *Anschluss* was achieved, and Austria became part of Germany.
- ◆ In September 1938 the Munich Conference took place, and Czechoslovakia surrendered the Sudetenland to Germany.
- ◆ In March 1939 Germany occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia.
- ◆ In August 1939 Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union.
- ◆ In September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Britain and France declared war on Germany.

- 1 Construct a timeline of the path to war (from 1933 to 1939). Beside each event, note which of the following applies.
 - A rejection of the Treaty of Versailles
 - B racial ideology
 - C *Lebensraum*

More than one may apply.
- 2 Select two of the following and explain what each reveals about Nazi foreign policy.
 - A The reoccupation of the Rhineland
 - B The *Anschluss*
 - C The Munich Conference
 - D The Soviet–German Non-Aggression Pact
- 3 Explain why Britain began to prepare for war in 1938.
- 4 Write a 2–3 minute speech to support or refute the following statement: 'Hitler's foreign policy combined consistency of aim with complete opportunism in method and tactics.' – Alan Bullock
- 5 In 1919, the French General Ferdinand Foch saw the new map of Europe after the Treaty of Versailles and, pointing to the Polish Corridor, he is said to have remarked, 'There lies the cause for the next war.'
 - i Why was the Polish Corridor created?
 - ii Based on what you have learnt, was Foch right or wrong in his observation in 1919? Justify your answer.
- 6 Class debate: 'The policy of appeasement was reasonable in its historical context.'

11.3

HISTORICAL DEBATES: THE CAUSES OF WORLD WAR II

The intentionalists: the traditional view of the origins of the war

British historian Richard Evans has suggested that what most Germans really wanted was the restoration of Germany as a great power without any blood shed. For a while, Hitler's early diplomatic victories over the Rhineland and then over Austria and Czechoslovakia seemed to be delivering this. But in 1939 his deliberate intent to invade Poland ended this run of success based on bluff. For many years after World War II there was no significant debate about the origins of the war. The widely accepted view, even among German historians, was that Hitler had caused the war through his policy of deliberate aggression in Europe, first in the east against Poland and then in the west against Britain and France. In 1941 he expanded this war when Germany attacked the Soviet Union and declared war on the United States.

It was accepted that Hitler had a clearly defined program as early as 1924, as outlined in *Mein Kampf*, and that once he was secure in power he began carrying out this program. Hitler planned to undo the settlement imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 and to bring back into the Reich those Germans who had been cut off by the peace treaty, thus creating a greater Germany. Ultimately, he planned to acquire vast territories in eastern Europe, which would be Germany's *Lebensraum*, or living space. Hitler's 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, forced the Western powers to finally declare war. Unlike in World War I, the responsibility for the war was clear. It was a 'just war' – a war fought to oppose a great evil.

This traditional view of Germany's action has been defined and defended by many historians, including British historians Alan Bullock and Hugh Trevor-Roper and German scholars such as Klaus Hildebrand. They see Hitler's ideology and willpower as crucial to any explanation of why the war developed. They are sometimes referred to as the 'intentionalist school', as their explanations of the causes of the war are based on Hitler's intent. Hitler made the major decisions in foreign policy, and therefore their interpretation of events is very 'Hitler-centric'.

THE INTENTIONALIST CASE: ALAN BULLOCK

None of the great powers comes well out of the history of the 1930s, but responsibility, even when it runs to appeasement for Britain and France or complicity in the case of Russia, is still recognisably different from that of a country [Germany] which deliberately creates the threat of war and sets out to exploit it.

In the Europe of the 1930s there were several leaders who would have liked to follow such a policy, but lacked the toughness of will and the means to carry it through. Hitler alone possessed the will and had provided himself with the means. Not only did he create the threat of war and exploit it, but when it came to the point he was prepared to take the risk and go to war. For this reason, despite all we have

→
learned since of the irresolution and shabbiness of other governments' policies, Hitler and the nation which followed him still bear the primary responsibility for the war which began in 1939.

Alan Bullock, *Hitler and the Origins of the War*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 53, 1967.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Where does Bullock think responsibility for the outbreak of World War II lies?
- 2 Explain his reference to 'the shabbiness of other governments' policies'?

The challenge of AJP Taylor

The first major historian to challenge the intentionalist view was British historian AJP Taylor. In 1961 he published *The Origins of the Second World War*, a book that generated great controversy, both in historical circles and in public debate.

Taylor suggested that Hitler was really no different from any other German leader. He sought to undo the Treaty of Versailles and to restore Germany to its standing as a great power, but he did not have a clearly defined program or blueprint for action. As far as *Mein Kampf* is concerned, Taylor argued that it cannot be taken seriously because it was written long before Hitler came to power. Many historians see the Hossbach Memorandum as evidence that Hitler did indeed have plans, but Taylor dismisses it as 'day dreaming, unrelated to what followed in real life'.¹⁶ According to Taylor, Hitler never took the initiative in foreign policy; rather, he was an opportunist and an improviser who simply took advantage of the situation and the opportunities created by others.

Taylor's critics, of which there were many, accused him of attempting to whitewash Hitler by suggesting that Germany was not solely responsible for the war in 1939. Although there is much in Taylor's ideas that is open to debate, he was in fact suggesting that one should go beyond the prevailing 'Hitler-centric' or intentionalist view. In a sense, Taylor's famous book was anticipating the structuralist historians, who offer a different interpretation.

Extract from AJP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*

Writers of great authority have seen in Hitler a system maker, deliberately preparing a great war which would destroy existing civilisation and make him master of the world. In my opinion statesmen are too absorbed by events to follow a preconceived plan. They take one step and the next follows from it ... Hitler's aim was change, the overthrow of the existing European order, his method was patience. Despite his bluster and violent talk, he was a master in the game of waiting. Like Joshua before the walls of Jericho he preferred to wait until the forces opposing him had been sapped by their own confusion ... Hitler did not make plans for world conquest or anything else. He assumed that others would provide opportunities and that he would seize them ... The war of 1939 far from being premeditated was a mistake, the result on both sides of diplomatic blunders.

Alan JP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin Books, London, 1964, pp. 98, 100, 172.

The structuralist interpretation of the origins of the war

Structuralist historians such as Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat do not dismiss the importance of Hitler, but they place far less emphasis on his personal role, focusing instead on the structure and functioning of the Nazi state. Books like Martin Broszat's *The Hitler State* (1981) view the regime as a collection of powerful and conflicting forces. Hitler's style of leadership encouraged this. He generally stayed aloof from the competing interests, intervening only when and where he wanted to.

The idea that Nazi Germany was a rigidly structured monolithic regime is now obsolete. The conflicting forces within caused the Nazi regime to increasingly become more radical and more extreme, making it almost impossible for moderate policies to exist. This also influenced the development of its foreign policy. The structuralists suggest that in foreign policy there was no consistent planning; rather, it was simply a series of responses and improvisations to the European situation. Taylor's suggestion that Hitler was an opportunist is revived in some of structuralist historians' more recent writings.

IAN KERSHAW ON THE ORIGINS OF THE WAR

He [Hitler] had never thought of avoiding war. On the contrary: reliving the lost first great war made him predicate everything on victory in the second great war to come. Germany's future, he had never doubted and had said so on innumerable occasions, could only be determined through war. In the dualistic way in which he always thought, victory would ensure survival, defeat would mean total eradication – the end of the German people. War – the essence of the Nazi system which had developed under his leadership – was for Hitler inevitable. Only the timing and the direction were at issue. And there was no time to wait. Starting from his own strange premises, given Germany's strained resources and the rapid strides forward in rearmament by Britain and France, there was a certain contorted logic in what he said. Time was running out on the options for Hitler's war.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*, Allen Lane, London, 2000, p. 229.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Identify three major points being made by Ian Kershaw about Hitler and the origins of the war.
- 2 Why did Hitler believe 'there was no time to wait'?

Issues for consideration

Generations of historians have studied the origins of World War II for 80 years, and there is general agreement that Germany's aggressive policies in Europe in the 1930s caused the war. British historian Alan Bullock's view, written in 1967, that 'Hitler and the nation which followed him still bear the primary responsibility for the war which began in 1939' is echoed now by the most recent generation of historians, including Ian Kershaw, who argues that Hitler 'never thought of avoiding war', and Adam Tooze (2006), with his observation that while Germany was 'chiefly responsible for unleashing the first shattering World War of the twentieth century. It was solely responsible for the second.'¹⁷

Nothing to do with Hitler and the Nazi regime is simple, but despite the debate on the origins of World War II, there is still a good deal of consensus. The importance of Hitler and his involvement in foreign policy is acknowledged by all; the debate is more to do with the degree of his influence. Was World War II caused by the aims of one man, or do its causes lie in the European situation created after 1919, which left Germany with a determination to undo the peace settlement and, more importantly, the power to do it?

- ◆ Was Hitler looking for a war or did he seek to attain his goals by bluff and threat?
- ◆ If he was planning a war of expansion in the east, why did he get a war in the west?
- ◆ When the war did break out in the west, is there any validity to Winston Churchill's remark that it was an 'unnecessary war'?

- ◆ Could Germany have been stopped, and if so, why did the Western powers not oppose the German actions until it was too late?
- ◆ Given the role of Hitler and the violent nature of the Nazi regime, should the idea of an 'unnecessary war' be replaced by the idea of an 'inevitable war'?
- ◆ Did Hitler have a clearly worked out program of expansion?
- ◆ Did he have a plan, as the intentionalist historians believe, or was he, as AJP Taylor suggested, an opportunist taking his chances?
- ◆ Is it more accurate to say that Hitler can only be understood if we realise that he was both – that he had a clear and consistent aim and that his method was that of the opportunist? As Alan Bullock argues, 'It was precisely because he knew where he wanted to go that Hitler could always afford to be opportunistic and saw how to take advantage of the mistakes and fears of others. Consistency of aim on Hitler's part has been confused with a timetable, blueprint, or plan of action fixed in advance ... Nothing of the sort. Hitler frequently improvised, kept his options open to the last possible moment and was never sure until he got there which of several courses of action he would choose.'¹⁸

HITLER THE OPPORTUNIST

Was Hitler an opportunist? Did he have broad goals and act with a high degree of flexibility, exploiting opportunities as they emerged?

- Hitler took the opportunity provided in March 1936 to reoccupy the Rhineland, believing that the international situation would make it unlikely that France would respond.
- The *Anschluss* in March 1938 was the result of Hitler exploiting the opportunity provided by the Austrian government's decision to call a plebiscite on the issue of union with Germany. Germany had no well-defined military plan for the takeover of Austria, but responded at short notice to the opportunity for action.
- Although Hitler did not ask Chamberlain to visit him in September 1938, he exploited the honourable intentions of the British prime minister, beginning the process that led to the surrender of the Sudetenland.

HITLER THE INTENTIONALIST

Were Hitler's aggressive actions planned and intended? Did they develop from an ideology, a clearly defined set of deliberate goals, and to a timetable?

- Hitler had a clear set of goals defined as early as *Mein Kampf* (1924). What he said in *Mein Kampf* was very close to what actually happened.
- In the period after 1924 Hitler spoke of *Lebensraum* and the desire to destroy the Soviet Union. From 1934 he set a course that very nearly led to this goal.
- The Hossbach Memorandum (1937) reaffirmed the foreign policy goal and defined a timetable for its implementation.
- The speed with which Hitler moved from the Czech crisis of 1938 to the Polish crisis of 1939 suggests intent, not opportunism.

- 1 What evidence can you provide to support AJP Taylor's claim that Hitler was an 'opportunist'?
- 2 Create a mind map about Nazi foreign policies and the path to war.
- 3 Why did the invasion of Poland in 1939 lead to the outbreak of World War II?
- 4 Explain why Hitler may have been surprised that war was declared in 1939.
- 5 Prepare a list of arguments to support the proposition that without Hitler there would never have been a general European war in 1939.
- 6 Summarise the different schools of thought about the causes of World War II. Why do the assessments vary?

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Account for the outbreak of war in 1939. Use evidence from at least two historians in your answer.
- 2 'It was appeasement as much as aggression that was responsible for the outbreak of World War II.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Endnotes

- 1 The Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Proceedings: vol. IX, p. 400.
- 2 Gerhard Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler's Germany*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980, p. 657.
- 3 Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2012, p. 5.
- 4 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, Murphy translation, Hurst & Blackett, London, 1939, p. 124.
- 5 Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Listener*, January 1973.
- 6 Quoted in David Irving, *The War Path: Hitler's Germany 1933–1939*, Macmillan, London, 1978, p. 29.
- 7 Alan JP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin Books, London, 1964, p. 134.
- 8 Hugh Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Hitler's Table Talk*, Redwood Press, London, 1953, p. 259.
- 9 Quoted in Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*, Harper Collins, London, 1991, p. 588.
- 10 Neville Chamberlain, national broadcast, 27 September 1938.
- 11 Neville Chamberlain Papers (Birmingham University Library).
- 12 Neville Chamberlain, national broadcast, 27 September 1938.
- 13 The Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Proceedings: vol. III, p. 584.
- 14 Winston Churchill, 5 October 1938, quoted in Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life*, Mandarin Books, London, 1967, p. 395.
- 15 Quoted in Stanley Olsen (ed.), *Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930–1964*, Collins, London, 1980, p. 143.
- 16 Alan JP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 169.
- 17 Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, Penguin Edition, 2006, p. xx.
- 18 Alan Bullock, quoted in Esmonde M Robertson, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Macmillan, London, 1971, p. 193.

Conflict in Europe 1939–1945

12.1

THE COURSE OF THE WAR
IN EUROPE

12.2

THE HOME FRONT

12.3

THE FINAL SOLUTION:
THE IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST
IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

12.4

THE END OF THE WAR, 1944–1945

12.5

AFTERMATH

Defeat. A German officer with a white flag seeking to surrender in the closing days of World War II



Getty Images/Ado-photos

KEY WORDS AND TERMS

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.

Blitz

The bombing of cities in Britain by Germany during World War II.

bunker

A heavily protected shelter deep beneath the gardens of Hitler's Reich Chancellery in Berlin, where Hitler lived from January 1945 and directed the last phase of the war. Hitler committed suicide in the bunker on 30 April 1945.

Final Solution

The term used by the Nazis for the murder of the Jews.

'Phoney War'

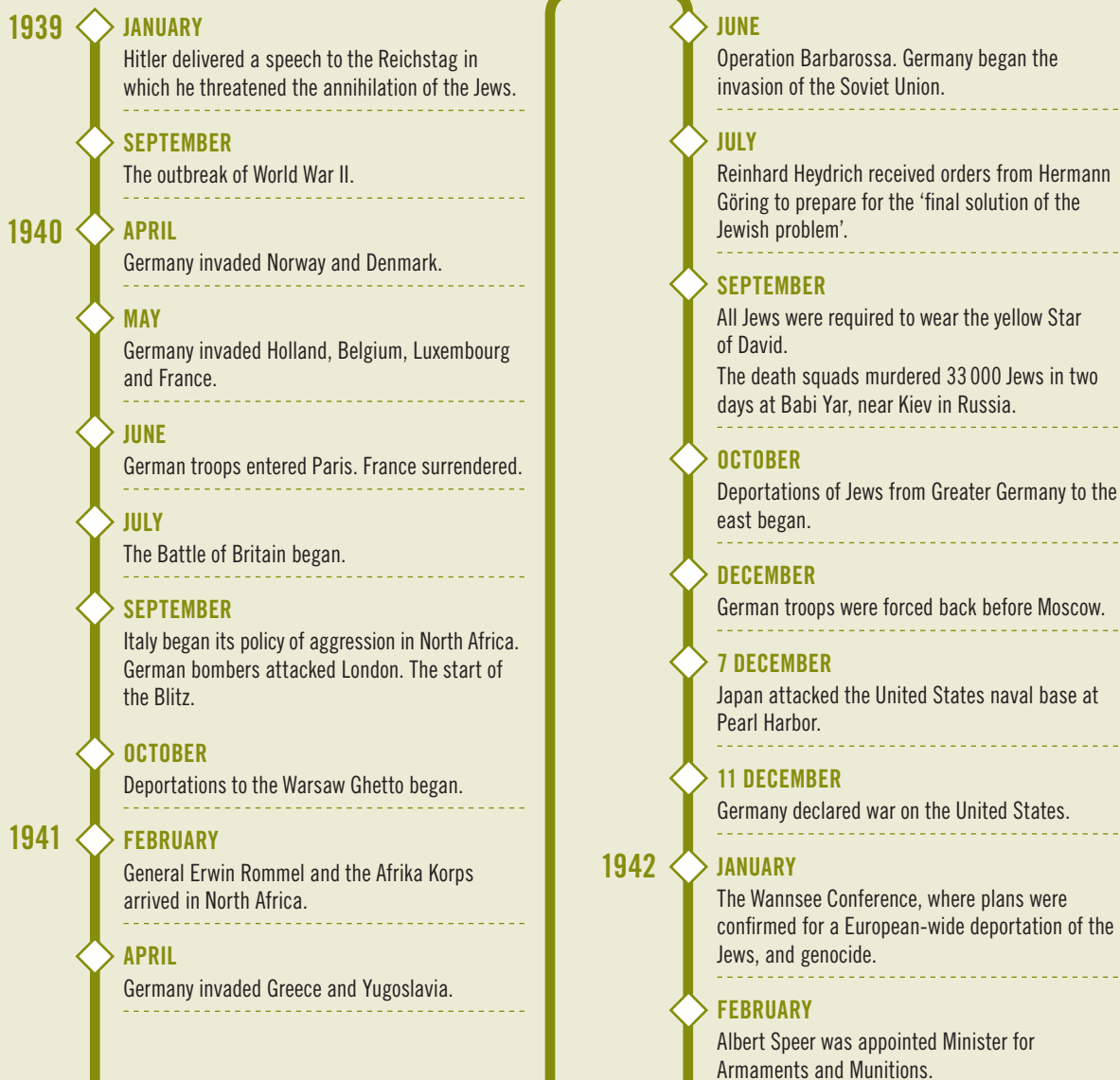
The name given to the period of World War II from the fall of Poland in 1939 to the German attacks in the west in April–May 1940.

scorched-earth policy

A policy of deliberate destruction of material, industry and property in order to leave nothing for the advancing enemy.

Conflict in Europe 1939–1945

TIMELINE





1943

APRIL

The German offensive was resumed in Russia with a push south to the Caucasus.

MAY

The first RAF 'Thousand Bomber Raid' on Cologne.

JULY

The Treblinka extermination camp opened in Poland.

SEPTEMBER

The Battle for Stalingrad began.

OCTOBER

The Battle of El Alamein.

NOVEMBER

United States troops landed in North Africa.

JANUARY

The first American bombing raids began over Germany.
The German Sixth Army surrendered at Stalingrad.

FEBRUARY

Goebbels called on the Germans to wage 'total war'.

JUNE

The first gassing of Jews at Auschwitz.
Himmler ordered the liquidation of all Polish ghettos.

JULY

The Allies began their invasion of Sicily. Mussolini was overthrown in Italy.

1944

JANUARY

Soviet troops entered Poland.

MAY

Hungarian Jews were sent to Auschwitz.

6 JUNE

The Allied landing at Normandy in northern France (D-Day).

1945

AUGUST

Paris was liberated.

NOVEMBER

Auschwitz ceased to function as an extermination camp.

JANUARY

Hitler returned to Berlin to make his last stand.

FEBRUARY

The German city of Dresden was destroyed in a massive air raid.

MARCH

The Allied armies began to cross the Rhine River.

12 APRIL

The death of US President Franklin Roosevelt.

16 APRIL

Soviet troops began the offensive to take Berlin.

28 APRIL

Mussolini was executed.

30 APRIL

Soviet troops took the ruins of the German Reichstag building.
Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide.

1 MAY

Joseph Goebbels and his wife committed suicide after killing their six children.

8 MAY

The war in Europe came to an end.

12.1

THE COURSE OF THE WAR IN EUROPE

Blitzkrieg, 1939

British military historian Antony Beevor has called World War II ‘the greatest man-made disaster in history’. The European war, which began with the German attack on Poland in September 1939, lasted until May 1945. Under the cover of this war the Germans carried out the most brutal example of genocide in world history with the systematic killing of Jews and other peoples deemed by the Nazis to be subhuman. The pattern of the war was one of swift decisive victories by Germany and their allies, followed by slow defeat and destruction. Hitler had unleashed the war, and ended up reaping the whirlwind of catastrophe that resulted in the total and utter defeat of Germany.

The Poles were in no position to withstand the massive *blitzkrieg* attack of the three German armies that attacked on 1 September 1939, and despite brave resistance, the Polish forces were soon defeated. Although Britain and France had declared war because of the German invasion of Poland, the Poles received no military support from them. Two weeks later, under the terms of the Nazi–Soviet Pact, Russian forces invaded Poland from the east, and by October the war against Poland was effectively over. Poland as a nation was partitioned between Germany and the Soviet Union. At the cost of only 11 000 German dead, Hitler had achieved a swift and stunning victory.



The fall of France

There was no major military action in western Europe in the winter of 1939–1940, and this period came to be called the ‘Phoney War’. Britain and France were not prepared to negotiate an end to the conflict, but nor were they prepared to launch an offensive.



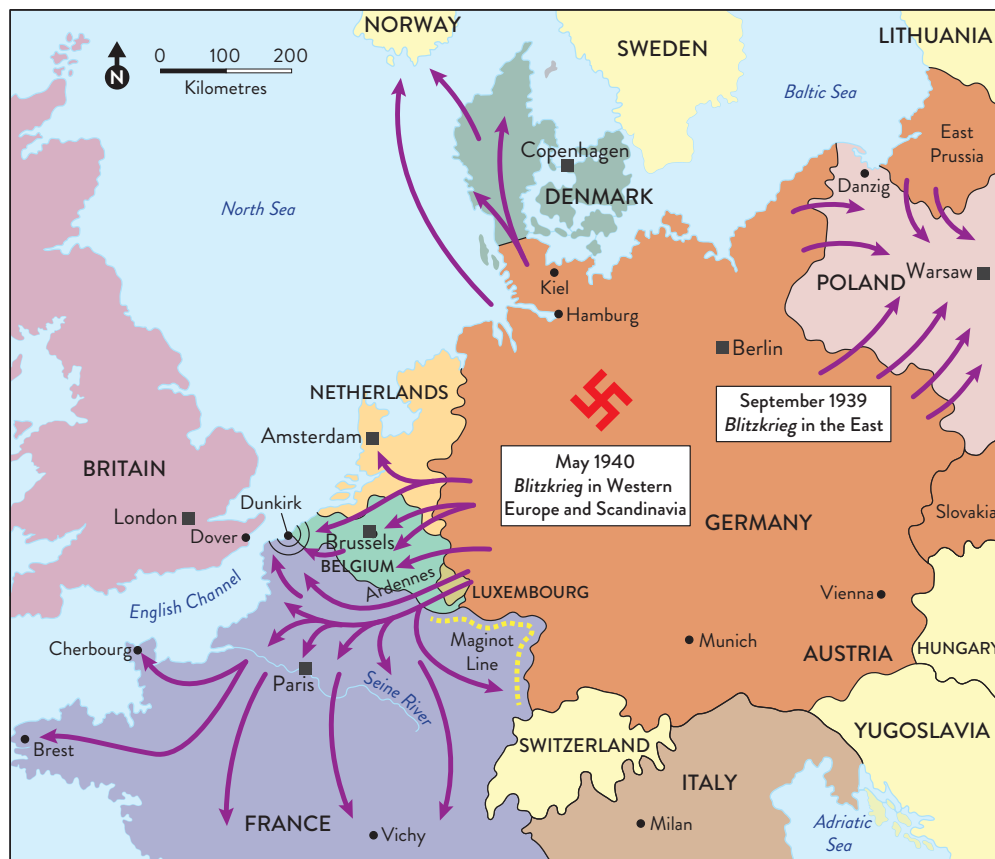
Getty Images/Heinrich Hoffmann/ulstein bild

Defeated British and French troops in 1940, waiting on the beach at Dunkirk to be picked up by small vessels and naval ships and taken back to England

In April 1940 Germany launched its long-awaited attack in the west with a surprise invasion of Norway and Denmark, followed by an attack on Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and France. Again the Germans used *blitzkrieg* tactics, which were even more overpowering than the attacks against Poland. Holland was quickly overwhelmed, and surrendered on 15 May. British forces had landed to assist in the defence of France and Belgium, but they were effectively cut off when the Germans launched a daring attack through the forests of the **Ardennes**, an area believed to be unsuitable for motorised warfare, and by 21 May the French and British armies in Belgium were trapped.

By late May and early June 1940, most of the trapped British and French troops had been forced back to the sea. In a remarkable feat of daring, most were taken back to England by a fleet of small vessels and naval ships from the coast of France at Dunkirk. More than 330 000 men were carried across the English Channel to the relative safety of England; 40 000 others were captured. Winston Churchill had taken over from Neville Chamberlain as Prime Minister that May, and in one of his first wartime speeches he told the British people, 'We must be careful not to assign to this deliverance the attributes of victory ... Wars are not won by evacuations.'¹

On 14 June the victorious German troops entered Paris. One week later, France surrendered. Hitler accepted the French surrender in the same railway carriage in the forest of Compiègne that the French had used to accept Germany's surrender in 1918. With this symbolic act, Hitler had avenged Germany's World War I defeat and finally erased the insult of the Treaty of Versailles. For the Germans it was a supremely triumphant moment. In just seven weeks the German armies had achieved what the Kaiser's armies had failed to achieve in the entire of World War I. Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg and France had been defeated and were under German control, leaving Britain to face the enemy alone. To the German people, Hitler appeared as a triumphant warlord who had given them a great victory.



Blitzkrieg: the German advances against Poland (1939) and then west, against Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France (1940).

The Battle of Britain

After the fall of France in May 1940 Hitler understood the difficulties of attempting an invasion of Britain; nonetheless, he issued a directive to his military leaders to prepare for 'Operation Sea Lion'. Any successful invasion of Britain required control of the air, and from its new bases in France and northern Europe the German air force began launching attacks on British targets. The Battle of Britain was fought in the skies over southern England from July to October 1940. Although the German air force had lost more planes than expected in the attacks in Poland and in the west, the head of the *Luftwaffe*, Hermann Göring, had assured Hitler it would take only a month to secure the skies over Britain. It began with German air attacks on RAF airfields and then extended to military targets and the bombing of population centres. In September the Germans began to bomb London and other major cities, but slowly the Royal Air Force broke the power of the *Luftwaffe*. By September, when it was clear that the *Luftwaffe* had failed to establish air supremacy, Hitler postponed the planned invasion of Britain.

The decisive factor in the Battle of Britain was the skill and courage of the RAF fighter pilots. While most were British, there were also fighter pilots from Poland and France, as well as parts of the British Empire including Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. The casualty rate was high. In August and September, when the Battle of Britain was at its height, the *Luftwaffe* lost more than 2000 aircraft, compared to the RAF's loss of 723.

The fighter pilots of the Battle of Britain had saved the nation from almost certain invasion. Their achievement 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.'



Battle of Britain



Getty Images/Topical Press Agency

British fighter pilots running to their Spitfire aircraft to meet a German attack during the Battle of Britain, 1940

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to the House of Commons, 4 June 1940



Churchill's speech

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 in 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 in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

The Blitz

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. The mood was summed up in the slogan 'We can take it', and was reflected in the attitude of one lone shopkeeper who, having lost the front of his shop in a bombing raid, reopened with a defiant sign, 'More open than usual'.



A London bus lies in a large crater in the road the morning after a German air raid during the Blitz, 15 October 1940.



A milkman delivering milk in a London street the morning after a German bombing raid. Firemen are dampening down the ruins behind him.

The war widens

The war expanded during 1940. In the Atlantic Ocean, German U-boats and surface vessels began the campaign to sink ships carrying vitally needed supplies to Britain. World War II was also fought in the Mediterranean Sea, and in the deserts of North Africa. Anxious to expand their territories and copy the spectacular success of the Germans, Italy had entered the war on the side of Germany in June 1940. The following month, the war spread when Italy also invaded Greece and Albania. The Italians then began military operations in North Africa, and from their colony in Libya they advanced towards the British in Egypt in September 1940. However, within two months the British and Commonwealth forces in Egypt, under the command of General Wavell, were able to counterattack. The Italians were driven back to Benghazi, nine divisions were destroyed and more

than 130 000 demoralised Italian troops surrendered. By early 1941 the Italians were in retreat in North Africa and facing defeat in Greece. As the Italians collapsed in North Africa, Hitler was forced to intervene, and dispatched German troops to save his ally. In February 1941 General Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps arrived.



Getty Images/Julstein bild Dtl.

The German crew of a U-Boat watching the sinking of a torpedoed vessel through the periscope during the Battle of the Atlantic in June 1942

The German attack on the Soviet Union, 1941

The widening war in North Africa and south-eastern Europe were distractions for Hitler, who was eager to focus on his real goal of attacking Russia. Although the British remained undefeated in the west, Hitler felt an urgency to begin the move to the east.

By all military logic a war on two fronts should have been avoided, but Hitler saw things differently – to the point that his decision to move against Russia in 1941 was neither challenged nor opposed by his military leadership. Hitler had strongly held ideological reasons for attacking Russia. This was the final quest to create Germany's future *Lebensraum*, which would ensure the survival of the thousand-year Reich. Hitler was also convinced that Russia's military capacity was inferior, and that any further delay went against the German interest. He also believed that the swift defeat of Russia would eliminate Britain's last possible ally on the continent, bringing the war to a final and triumphant conclusion.

The invasion of Russia, 'Operation Barbarossa', was the largest military campaign of the war. The attack began on 22 June 1941, taking the Russians completely by surprise. Three powerful German armies made up of 153 divisions, 3 million men and 46 tank battalions 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 technique of *blitzkrieg* 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 more than 2 million Russian soldiers.



Operation Barbarossa



The German attack on the Soviet Union, 1941

In December, as winter set in, Army Group Centre reached the outskirts of Moscow. The nighttime temperature fell to as low as minus 50 degrees Celsius, and as German soldiers lacked adequate winter clothing 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 Russians, reinforced with troops who had been moved from the Far Eastern Front, launched a major counterattack, driving the Germans back more than 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 5 million killed or wounded, and another 5 million taken prisoner. The German army had lost more than 1 million. There were several reasons 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 flawed too – 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 of these (the Ukraine) was taken. Finally, with arrogant certainty about their ability to achieve a swift victory, the German military planners had almost ignored the consequences and reality of a winter campaign.

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.

Charles Burdick (ed.), *The Halder War Diary 1939–1942 Presidio*, London, 1988, p. 506.

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to Halder, what were the advantages and limitations of the Russian army?
- 2 Who did Halder believe had the long-term advantage?

Stalingrad

In April 1942 Hitler, who had taken over as commander-in-chief of the army, ordered a new summer offensive in Russia. Confident in his strength, Hitler then made the mistake of dividing his southern army. One group would move south to take the Caucasus and the oil fields, and the Sixth Army, with its Hungarian, Romanian and Italian allies, would move east to take the city of Stalingrad on the Volga River.



akg-images/Pictures from History

The face of defeat. A Russian soldier with a German prisoner after the surrender of the German army in January 1943 at Stalingrad



A Soviet propaganda cartoon showing Adolf Hitler shovelling his troops into the top of a coffee grinding machine labelled 'Stalingrad'. The handle is being turned by Stalin.



The Battle of Stalingrad was not only a military turning point of the war in Europe, it was a psychological turning point as well. It meant that the Germans were not invincible. After the victory of Stalingrad, the Soviet people began to believe in themselves, and that victory over Germany was possible. The war would now move slowly towards the west, and the ultimate goal was the destruction of Berlin.

Germany declares war on the United States

In the very week that the Russians 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 – in the words of British historian AJP Taylor, 'two world powers who only asked to be left alone'.² The war had ceased to be a European conflict and had truly become a world war. Despite the fact that the United States had been attacked by Japan, President Franklin Roosevelt understood the real danger of Germany, and the United States' military strategy and policy was, from the start, based on the decision to prioritise the defeat of Germany.

The changing fortunes of war: Battle of El Alamein, October 1942

As the great battles against the Soviet Union moved to the German defeat at Stalingrad, the Germans were also facing defeat in North Africa.

Erwin Rommel's army had been sent to North Africa in March 1942 to support the failing Italian military efforts, and within a month he had counterattacked and managed to drive the British back to the borders of Egypt. The desert war now became the major preoccupation of the British. North Africa was the only place where Britain and its allies were able to face the German land forces at that point in the war. Equally important, if Egypt fell, the Germans would gain control of the Suez Canal, the gateway to Britain's empire in India and beyond.

The Battle of El Alamein, fought in the Egyptian desert in late October and early November 1942, was one of the significant battles of World War II. Rommel's forces totalled about 100 000 men, while the British Eighth Army under Field Marshal Montgomery had almost double that number, and almost 1000 tanks. Despite pressure from Winston Churchill, the ever-cautious Montgomery would not act until he was ready. Rommel had completed his battle plan but was away on sick leave in Germany when the battle finally began. But even Rommel's brilliance could not prevail. Despite being ordered by Hitler to fight to the last, Rommel ordered a strategic withdrawal in the face of overwhelming opposition, and by May 1943 all enemy forces in North Africa had been eliminated.

El Alamein gave the Allies their first major victory over the Germans. For the British, this morale booster came at a time when it was sorely needed. Church bells were rung throughout the land, perhaps symbolic of the fact that by 1943 the tide of war had begun to run in their favour. The United States had also entered the war against Germany, and they had also made landings in North Africa.

By 1943 the German armies had lost the initiative on all fronts, and they never regained it. The Russian army began the push that would force the *Wehrmacht* back towards the Reich. For Germany, the cost of Hitler's dream for *Lebensraum* in the east was 1 million dead, 4 million wounded, 3 million captured and more than another 1 million missing. The great offensives of the early years of the war now gave way to Germany on the defensive.



Battle of El Alamein

THE COURSE OF THE WAR: 1939–1943

- ◆ Although Hitler ultimately planned a war in the east, his aggressive actions against Poland triggered a war in the west between Britain and France from September 1939.
- ◆ The period from late 1939 until the spring of 1940 saw little military action on the western front. This period became known as the 'Phoney War'.
- ◆ In May 1940 Hitler began a series of spectacular military successes in the west, defeating Norway, Denmark, Holland, Luxembourg and finally France.
- ◆ On 14 June 1940 the victorious German troops entered Paris.
- ◆ Germany and Britain fought the Battle of Britain in 1940, but Germany was unable to defeat British air power and gain control of the skies.
- ◆ The bombing of British cities also began what was called the Blitz.
- ◆ Despite Germany's failure to defeat Britain, Hitler turned to his ultimate goal, the conquest of Soviet Russia, and in June 1941 Operation Barbarossa, was launched.
- ◆ After early successes, by the winter of 1941 the German armies had not yet achieved their goals.
- ◆ In December 1941, in response to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, Hitler declared war on the United States.
- ◆ In the North African desert, the war finally began to move in the Allies' favour with the victory at the Battle of El Alamein in October 1942.
- ◆ The Russian campaign came to a climax in January 1943 when the German army suffered its greatest defeat, at the Battle of Stalingrad. The tide of the war in the east began to turn against Germany.

- 1 When was the period known as 'Phoney War'? Why was it called this?
- 2 Study the cartoon below, then answer the questions that follow.



David low, 'Very well, alone', *Evening Standard*, 18 June 1940.

- i What was the military situation for Britain when this cartoon appeared in June 1940?
 - ii Outline how this situation had come about.
 - iii Explain the particular point being made in the cartoon, and why the cartoon is effective in making this point.
- 3 Explain why Germany was so militarily successful in the period between 1939 and 1941.
 - 4 Outline *blitzkrieg* tactics and explain why they were more likely to be successful in France than in the USSR.
 - 5 Why did Hitler open a second front by invading Russia in July 1941?
 - 6 Research: Find German and Russian primary sources on the Battle of Stalingrad, e.g. photos, diary entries, memoirs. Why did the Germans refer to it as *Rattenkrieg*? What evidence can you find in the sources to support the term?
 - 7 Explain how each of the following events was a turning point in World War II.
 - i Battle of Britain
 - ii Battle of Stalingrad
 - iii Battle of El Alamein

12.2

THE HOME FRONT

Germany had always planned for a quick war, so they were not prepared for the long war that ultimately developed. Expecting a quick victory, there was no attempt to bring the nation to an immediate total war footing, unlike Britain, where there were immediate and severe demands made on the British people. The British prime minister, Winston Churchill, told his people that he had nothing to offer them except 'blood, sweat, toil and tears'.

Despite the fact that Germany was a totalitarian state, Hitler was very conscious of public opinion. He believed that Germany's collapse in 1918 had been caused by unrest and dissent at home, that the severe food shortages, loss of morale and the outbreak of revolution had broken the German will to win. This was not to happen again, so the Nazis sought to minimise the impact of the war on German civilians and to maintain morale.



The home front

The war economy

Although food rationing was introduced as soon as war began, it was not severe. The level of consumer production remained high, and as late as 1943, 6 million Germans were still employed in the production of consumer goods. The government believed that it could maintain the pre-war standard of living for the civilian population, and to strengthen the domestic economy, food and supplies were taken from the occupied territories. In the summer of 1941, when the campaign against the Soviet Union began, Hitler in fact ordered a reduction in the production of armaments. In the early years of the war, other than the production of U-boats, German armaments production did not increase, and in fact war production in Britain during this time was greater than in Germany.

It could be argued that, had Germany demanded more sacrifice from the home front and put in place a total war economy, the final outcome of the conflict may well have been different. However, German military expenditure did increase rapidly after 1937, from 11.7 billion reichmarks in 1937 to more than 70 billion in 1941.



The economy

THE GERMAN WAR ECONOMY

SOURCE A: Tank and aircraft production 1940–1944

Aircraft production output	Germany	Britain	USA	USSR
1940	10 200	15 000	6100	7000
1941	11 000	20 100	19 400	12 500
1942	14 200	23 600	47 800	26 000
1943	25 200	26 200	85 900	37 000
1944	39 600	26 500	96 300	40 000

Tank production output	Germany	Britain	USA	USSR
1940	1600	1400	300	2800
1941	3800	4800	4100	6400
1942	6300	8600	25 000	24 700
1943	12 100	7500	29 500	24 000
1944	19 000	4600	17 600	29 000

SOURCE B: Adam Tooze on the German war economy

The German economy was simply not strong enough to create the military force necessary to overwhelm all its European neighbours including both Britain and the Soviet Union, let alone the United States ... though the victories of the German army in 1940 and 1941 were undoubtedly spectacular they were inconclusive. We are thus left with the conclusion that Hitler went to war in September 1939 without any coherent plan as to how to actually defeat the British Empire, his major antagonist.

Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, Penguin, 2006, p. xxv.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What evidence is there in Source A that war production in Britain in the early years of the war was greater than in Germany?
- 2 What are some of the limitations of Source A?
- 3 What is the main point being made in the document extract in Source B?
- 4 How does the evidence in Source A support the observations made in Source B?

Albert Speer

In February 1942 Hitler appointed his architect, Albert Speer, as Minister for Armaments and Munitions. Although Speer had no experience with weaponry or munitions, Hitler valued his proven organisational ability. Speer had the technical and administrative skills and enthusiasm to find solutions to the problems of war production. He also had the self-confidence, because of his relationship with Hitler, to demand Hitler's support when dealing with the complex and conflicting agencies of the Nazi state. From 1942 until the end of the war in 1945, Speer was one of the main planners of the German war economy, and was responsible for the production of armaments and the construction of strategic defences. Speer now faced very significant problems. He had taken responsibility for a vast enterprise, and had to solve three key issues that would decide the war effort:

- ◆ how to eliminate the gross inefficiencies of war production
- ◆ how to increase armaments and munitions production despite the growing scarcity of raw materials and the problems of labour shortages
- ◆ how to keep production going despite the increasing bombing of German factories and other production targets.

Speer's appointment was accompanied by the full mobilisation of the German economy for war production. From the start, Speer believed that a total mobilisation (call-up) of the workforce was needed if Germany was to avoid military defeat. He began to carry out a reorganisation of the system of economic management, overcoming the conflicting interests and jealousies of party officials,



Albert Speer

and eliminating duplication and wastage. Before Speer, German business and industry had been excluded from any planning in the production of weaponry. This now changed, as Speer believed that the knowledge and expertise of German business was needed for the war effort. One of the greatest problems Speer faced was finding enough workers for war production. Despite resistance from other Nazi officials, he succeeded in diverting some of the 6 million workers who were engaged in producing consumer items, moving them to war production. The registration of all men and women under 50 years of age for compulsory labour added another 1.3 million to the workforce by 1943. But the bulk of the labour used for German war industry after 1943 came from able-bodied workers conscripted from German-occupied countries.

The German government had no hesitation in using and relocating huge numbers of foreign workers and prisoners, who were then set to work as forced labour in German industry and war production. The recruitment of these workers was the responsibility of Fritz Sauckel, the Inspector-General of Manpower in the Reich, but it was Albert Speer who determined the numbers that were required and where they were required.

By September 1944, when war production reached its peak, there were more than 7 million foreign labourers and 400 000 prisoners of war working as slave labourers.

German war production

With his natural interest in technology, Speer pushed for the development of new and improved weaponry. He used the raw materials available to the best possible advantage, and he displayed an energy and enthusiasm for his task that inspired others.

In his first six months in the role (March to July 1942), armaments production increased by 55 per cent, and by May 1943 it had increased a further 50 per cent. Despite the increased bombing from 1943, German armaments production continued to increase, and Speer's department also kept the German transport system functioning. The production of planes increased from 11 000 in 1941 to 39 000 in 1944, and tank production increased from 3800 tanks in 1941 to 19 000 in 1944.³ In September 1944 German armaments production finally reached its peak, with production outputs three times greater than the figure for 1941. At his trial after the war, Speer revealed the extent of his success in armaments production. 'In the year 1944,' he said, 'I could completely re-equip 130 infantry divisions and 40 armoured divisions. That involved new equipment for two million men. This figure would have been 30 per cent higher had it not been for the bombing attacks.'⁴



Albert Speer with Adolf Hitler in March 1942, shortly after he was appointed as Minister for Armaments and Munitions

MUNITIONS PRODUCTION

Value of combat munitions production 1935–1944

	1935–1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944
	US\$ billion					
USA	0.3	1.5	4.5	20	38	42
Britain	0.5	3.5	6.5	9	11	11
USSR	1.6	5	8.5	11.5	14	16
Germany	2.4	6	6	3.5	13.5	17

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain why munitions production in the United States increased so substantially in 1942.
- 2 Why was the United States' output able to continue to increase so rapidly?
- 3 What conclusions can you draw about munitions production in Germany between 1935 and 1944?

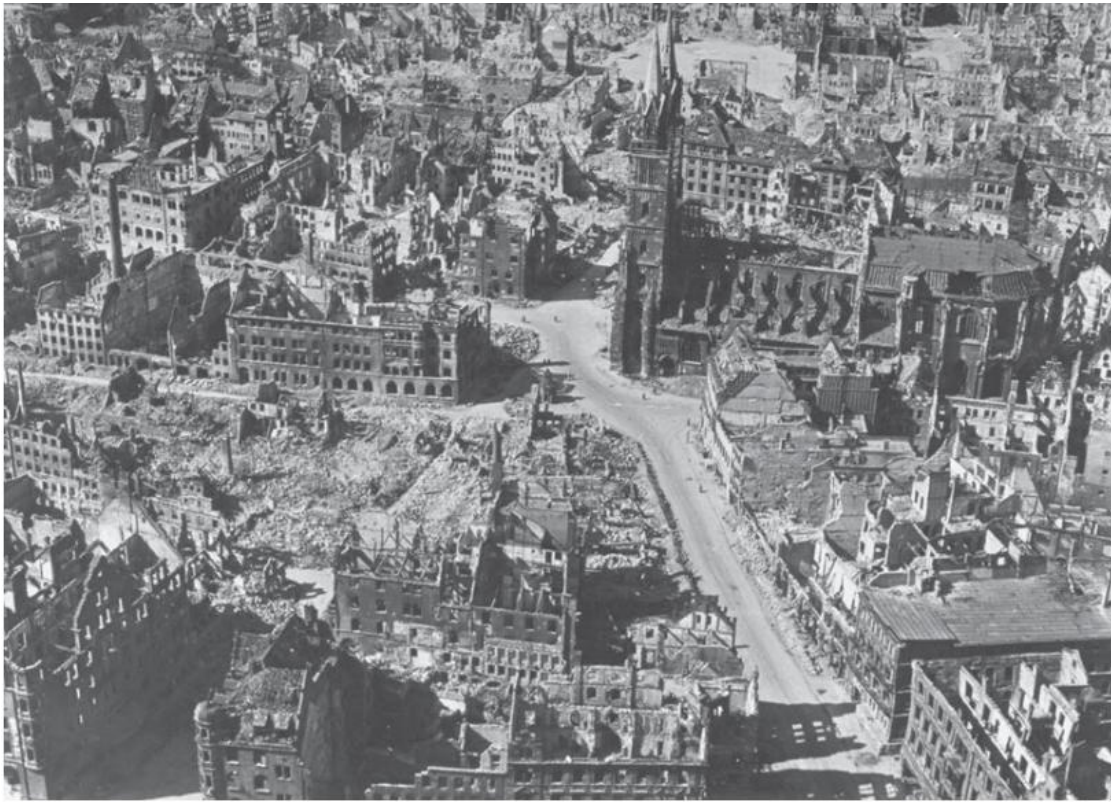
In 1943 Speer took over the production of U-boats, and to repair his bombed factories, Speer developed an efficient system of mobile repair units that achieved extraordinary feats in getting bombed factories back into production in record time. Only aircraft production, still jealously guarded by Hermann Göring, remained outside his authority.

The bombing of Germany and its effects

For people living in the major German cities or industrial centres like the Ruhr, the air attacks by the British RAF became part of life. In 1942 the Royal Air Force conducted a number of 'thousand-bomber raids' on the cities of Cologne, Essen and Bremen. Although most did not feature the heavy bombers then in production, the effect of these raids was to demonstrate the growing strength of British air power. As the RAF developed bigger bombers and better target and radar technology, carpet bombing of cities took place, with the aim of breaking the morale of the German civilians.

The bombing worsened from 1943, when the United States began to attack German targets as well. In July 1943, when the RAF attacked Hamburg, more than 30 000 people were killed, many enveloped in the firestorm that developed from the attack. What happened in Hamburg came as a shock to the German people. 'The fact that one city after another can be attacked and razed to the ground weighs like a nightmare on the people,' wrote one government official. 'It makes a considerable contribution to the general feeling of insecurity and helplessness.'⁵ The RAF bombing of the historic city of Dresden on 13 February 1945, when the war was in its final year, killed between 25 000 and 40 000 Germans and created a firestorm that burned for 48 hours, consuming the entire city centre.

One of the aims of the bombing was to break the morale of the German people. Certainly it created a world that was deadly and disruptive, but there was no real evidence that the bombing broke the will of the German people or turned them against the government. The air war killed close to 600 000 German civilians, but German morale did not break, although there is strong evidence that the issue deeply worried some of the Nazi leadership, in particular the Propaganda Minister, Dr Goebbels.



Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/Margaret Bourke-White

As the situation for Germany worsened, German cities were exposed to regular air attacks from both the RAF and the American Air Force.

The other major aim of the bombing was to destroy and disrupt Germany's wartime industry. How successful this was is the subject of some debate among historians. A number of the leading military figures of the Reich who survived the war, and even Hjalmar Schacht, Hitler's former Minister for Economics, all admitted that the bombing campaign did affect German wartime production. For some months in 1943 the British and American bombing seriously disrupted Albert Speer's armaments production. However, production levels recovered in 1944. It was only in 1945 that the bombing came close to achieving its ultimate goal of destroying the German war economy. As in the Blitz in London in 1940, when German bombing killed more than 40 000 people, morale was not broken and war production increased steadily. People suffered, but the majority got used to it.

RICHARD EVANS ON RICHARD OVERY, *THE BOMBING WAR: EUROPE, 1939–1945*

The economic effects of bombing were hugely exaggerated on all sides: German production was dented but not destroyed. The relocation and dispersal of arms factories to safer areas; the camouflage of manufacturing sites and the rapidity with which key sites, such as the ball-bearing factory at Schweinfurt, were reconstructed after an attack, all helped ensure that German arms production peaked quite late on in the war, in 1944, under the impact of arms minister Albert Speer's economic rationalisation programme.

Bombing was surprisingly inefficient. As Overy shows, poor visibility, the sudden deterioration of weather conditions, malfunctioning equipment, outdated and slow-moving aircraft, pilot

inexperience or crew exhaustion, and enemy action varying from anti-aircraft batteries to night-fighters or the jamming of navigation beams, all reduced the effectiveness of bomber fleets. Aircraft crashed, ran out of fuel or suffered engine failure with astonishing frequency. The death rate among bomber crews was appallingly high (crew members in Bomber Command had a one-in-four chance of surviving their first tour of duty, and a one-in-10 chance of surviving their second) but not all of it was as a result of enemy action. At the end of 1941 Bomber Command reckoned that it was losing six aircraft to accidents for every one shot down by the enemy.

Above all, bombing was staggeringly inaccurate. Bomber fleets had to fly high to avoid anti-aircraft fire from the ground, so even if the weather was clear, they were often unable to locate their targets effectively.

One report, compiled in September 1941, reported that only 15% of aircraft were bombing within five miles of their target. In the last three months of 1944, it was reckoned that only 5.6% of bombs fell within a mile of the aiming point if there was cloud, despite the use of electronic navigation aids.

The Guardian, 27 September 2013.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What impact does Richard Overy believe Allied bombing had on German war production?
- 2 What evidence does Overy provide to support his claim that the Allied bombing campaign was inefficient?
- 3 Using this source and your own knowledge, assess the impact of Allied bombing on the course of World War II.

Getty Images/ulstein bild Dtl.



A young woman working in the armaments industry carries out a repair to a Junker Ju-88, a twin-engined combat aircraft used by the *Luftwaffe*.

Women

In 1942, as part of his demand for total mobilisation, Speer requested that women take their place in the workforce. Hitler still opposed this, believing that the role of women was to be mothers and wanting to retain traditional roles in order to maintain civilian morale. However, from 1943, as the war situation worsened, more German women were forced to enter the labour force. From 1943, women aged 17 to 45 could be conscripted into the German workforce but there were many exemptions, which limited the impact. Many women resisted attempts to bring them back into the workforce and their number never matched the 2 million British women at work on war production. Had German women been used in the workforce from the start of the war, some 3 million extra men would have been released for military service. By 1945, when the war entered its final desperate year and more and more men were forced into military services, German women made up nearly 60 per cent of the workforce.



Women

Goebbels and wartime propaganda

Just as Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry had been so important in helping the Nazis consolidate their hold over the German people during the years of peace, it also became a vital element during wartime.

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 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.'⁶ Propaganda took the form of newsreels and reports from the fronts. The task was easy for Goebbels in the early years of the war, because the victories spoke for themselves. The great military victories in 1939 and 1940 made it relatively easy to maintain German morale.

But by 1943 the German armies were on the defensive as the Russian armies drove them back out of the lands they had occupied. The Allies had landed in Italy, and were preparing to land in France. German cities were being bombed day and night, and the enormous industrial and military might of the United States was flowing into the war effort to defeat Hitler. Now everyone was urged to work hard for victory. Goebbels 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.

In February 1943, in a powerful speech in the Sportpalast in Berlin that was broadcast on every radio station, Goebbels called on the German people to wage total war.

TOTAL WAR

SOURCE A: War poster, May 1942



War poster of May 1942:
'One battle, one will, one
goal: Victory at any cost!'



SOURCE B: 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!*

Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, Damstadt, 1961, p. 380.

SOURCE C



Goebbels delivering his 'Total war' speech to a huge crowd at the Sportpalast in Berlin in February 1943

Alamy Stock Photo/Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo



QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the aim of the poster (Source A)?
- 2 Explain how the colour and images in the poster convey the message.
- 3 Why did Germany need to embrace the concept of 'total war' by 1943?
- 4 In what way does the poster (Source A) reflect the message of Goebbels' speech (Source B)?
- 5 How does Source C help you to better understand Source B?

GERMAN WAR PRODUCTION

- ◆ The German economy was not geared up for a long war, and at the start of the war, the nation was not placed on a full war footing.
- ◆ The victories in 1940 meant there was no immediate switch to a war economy in Germany.
- ◆ As late as 1943, 6 million Germans were still employed in the production of consumer goods.
- ◆ When Albert Speer took over the planning of armaments production, there was a call for full mobilisation for the war effort.
- ◆ The home front was seriously affected by the increasing bombing of German cities and factories by the RAF and the United States Air Force.
- ◆ Germany was slow in forcing women into war production.
- ◆ In 1943, after the defeats in Russia, Germany was finally forced into a full war economy. Goebbels called for total war.

12.2 SUMMARY

- 1 What role did women play in Germany during World War II?
- 2 How did Allied bombing impact on Germany during the 1940s?
- 3 Explain how the German economy changed once the war began in 1939.
- 4 Create a mind map: 'How did the war impact on the German front?'
- 5 Speech: Prepare an argumentative speech that assesses the importance of Albert Speer to the Third Reich. In your speech you should cover his role as Hitler's architect and his role in armaments and war production.
- 6 Albert Speer is sometimes described as an 'apolitical technocrat'. What is a technocrat? What is the evidence for and against this claim?
- 7 Research: How did World War II affect children in Germany? In pairs, research the different experiences of children, looking for similarities and differences that may have been caused by differences in age, gender, location, background and the progression of the war.

12.2 QUESTIONS

12.3

THE FINAL SOLUTION: THE IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST IN OCCUPIED TERRITORIES



The swift victory of Germany's armies between 1939 and 1941 brought millions of European Jews under the direct control of the growing Nazi state. These included Jews in western Europe, as well as 3 million Jews in the newly occupied Poland. As Germany continued to advance east, millions of Jews in the Soviet Union, as well as other racial groups regarded as inferior by the Nazis, came under the control of the Third Reich.

HITLER ON THE JEWISH QUESTION, 30 JANUARY 1939

SOURCE STUDY

Europe cannot find peace until the Jewish question has been solved ... In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet and have usually been ridiculed for it. During the time of my struggle for power it was in the first instance only the Jewish race that received my prophecies with laughter when I said that I would one day take over the leadership of the State and with it that of the whole nation, and that I would then, among other things, settle the Jewish problem. Their laughter was uproarious, but I think that for some time now they have been laughing on the other side of their face ... Today I will once more be a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe!

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 3, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1988, p. 1049.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What does Hitler mean by 'the Jewish problem'?
- 2 What threat towards the Jewish people does Hitler make in this speech of 1939?

The Jews of Poland

Hitler was determined to eliminate the Jews from Germany and the lands it had conquered. In Poland, where the systematic killing of Jews began, the first step was to establish a process of ghettoisation – the separation of Jews from the normal community. Jewish communities who had lived in Poland for more than eight centuries were forced to move, herded into more than 400 ghettos and camps across the country. The largest ghetto was in the Polish capital, Warsaw, where more than 400 000 Jews were confined to a small area of the city. More than 40 000 of them starved to death in 1941. Later in the war, the great majority of Polish Jews in the ghettos and labour camps were moved to extermination camps at Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka and Majdanek. Of Poland's 3 million Jews, 2.6 million were dead by 1945.

Sign at the entrance of Treblinka Camp, Poland

Attention Warsaw Jews!

You are now entering a transit camp from which you will be transported to a labour camp. To prevent epidemics both clothing and luggage must be handed in for disinfecting. Gold, cash, foreign exchange and jewellery are to be given up at the cash desk in return for a receipt. They will be later returned on presentation of the receipt. All those arriving must cleanse themselves by taking a bath before continuing their journey.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 3, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1988, p. 1154.



The major concentration and extermination camps that existed during World War II

From the diary of Dr Goebbels on the removal of Polish Jews to the extermination camps, 27 March 1942

It is a pretty barbarous business—one would not wish to go into detail—and there are not many Jews left. I should think one could reckon that about sixty per cent of them have been liquidated and about forty per cent taken for forced labour ... one simply cannot be sentimental about these things. The Führer is the moving spirit of this radical solution in both word and deed.

Helmut Krausnick and Martin Broszat, *Anatomy of the SS State*, Collins, London, 1968, p. 120.



The Einsatzgruppen in the east

In 1941, special units were formed within the SS for the sole purpose of killing Jews and other undesirables in the occupied territory of the east. These Einsatzgruppen, or Special Action Units, were formed under the authority of Reinhard Heydrich, each consisting of up to 800 carefully selected men. As the German army advanced into Russia, the Einsatzgruppen operated with absolute authority behind the line. There was no attempt to conceal their activities; indeed, they often photographed their work.

The majority of the victims were Russian Jews or captured political leaders (Commissars). Most were shot and buried in mass graves. The largest single operation took place in September 1941, at Babi Yar near Kiev in southern Russia, where 33 000 Jews were killed in two days. In the first year of their activity in the occupied east, these SS death squads killed 1.4 million Jews and Russians. The army accepted and supported the activities of the Einsatzgruppen in Russia, and many German officers also accepted the Nazi doctrine that Jews and Bolsheviks were linked and that Slavs were subhuman. In some parts of south-eastern Europe, such as the Balkans, an area later occupied by German troops, the *Wehrmacht* itself carried out some of the killing of peoples deemed to be subhuman (*Untermenschen*).

German soldiers of the *Waffen SS* look on as a member of the Einsatzgruppen shoots a Ukrainian Jew on the edge of a mass grave in 1942

A REPORT FROM EINSATZGRUPPEN C IN THE UKRAINE (RUSSIA), NOVEMBER 1941

SOURCE STUDY

As far as the actual executive actions are concerned, the Commandos of the Einsatzgruppen have liquidated around 80 000 persons up to now ... Several retaliatory measures were carried out in the context of major operations. The largest of these actions took place immediately after the capture of Kiev [a city in Russia]; Jews with their whole families were utilised [killed]. The difficulty arising from such a major operation – above all as regards getting hold of them – were overcome in Kiev by putting up wall posters inviting Jews to be resettled. Although initially we only expected about 5000–6000 Jews would report, 30 000 Jews turned up who, as a result of a very clever piece of organisation, still believed they were going to be resettled just before their execution.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 3, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1988, p. 1095.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the Einsatzgruppen?
- 2 What do these sources reveal about the role of the Einsatzgruppen?

Planning the Final Solution

From 1941 the Nazis' treatment of the Jews worsened. Jews were already excluded from the social and economic life of the nation, and in September 1941 a new law forced all German Jews to wear the distinctive yellow Star of David on their clothing. Once Jews were more visible in public, momentum quickly grew for their expulsion. Anti-Jewish policies quickly grew more radical. Jews could no longer travel beyond their local community without a written police permit, and those Jews who did travel were only allowed to occupy the third-class section on trains. From May 1942 a new regulation even forced Jews to hand over their pets.

This radicalisation came to a head in late 1941, when the decision was made to transport all the Jews in Germany and the occupied territories to the east. In May 1943, Germany was declared to be *judenfrei* (free of Jews). The official reason given was resettlement, but the reality was that the decision had been made to exterminate the Jews.

There is no exact date or document that shows when Hitler officially approved the so-called **Final Solution**, but the fact that he approved it is not in doubt. An operation as enormous as the murder of Europe's Jews could not have happened without his approval. Hitler made his will known to men like Himmler and Göring, and that was enough. Once again, these men, and the men they led, were 'working towards the Führer'.

The Wannsee Conference

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. Göring empowered Heydrich to draw up arrangements for the overall solution to what the Nazi leadership called 'the Jewish problem'. Heydrich had drafted a letter of authority, and Göring signed it.

Göring's letter to Heydrich on measures required for the Final Solution, July 1941

Reich Marshal of the Grossdeutsches Reich

Berlin, July 31, 1941

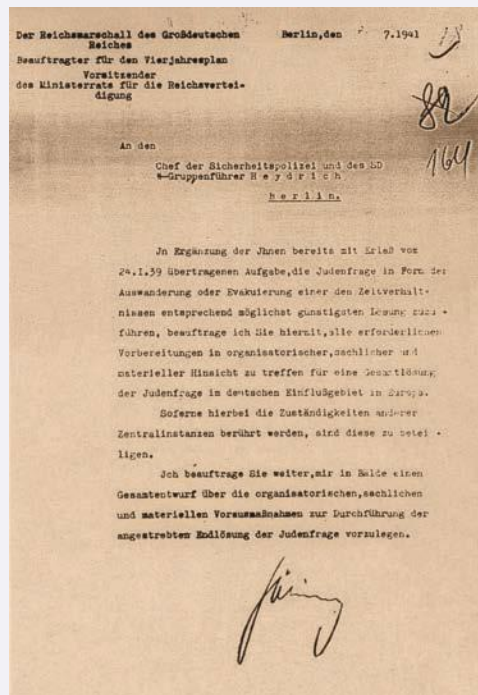
Plenipotentiary for the Four-Year Plan

Chairman of the Ministerial Council for Defence
of the Reich

To the Head of the Security Police and SD,

SS-Major General [Gruppenführer] Heydrich, Berlin

Supplementary to the task entrusted to you by the decree of January 24, 1939, to solve the Jewish question under the prevailing circumstances by emigration or evacuation in the most favourable way possible, I herewith charge you with making all necessary preparations with regard to organisational, technical and material matters for bringing about a total solution of the Jewish question (*Gesamtloesung der Judenfrage*) within the German sphere of influence in Europe.



imagefotow/Asset Management

Inasmuch as the competences of other central organisations will hereby be affected, they are to be included.

I further commission you to submit to my office in the near future an overall plan that shows the preliminary organisational, practical and material measures requisite for the implementation of the projected final solution of the Jewish question.

[handwritten signature]

Göring

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.), *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader*, vol. 3, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 1988, p. 1104.

Alamy Stock Photo/World History Archive



Reinhard Heydrich, Deputy to SS Head Heinrich Himmler, chaired the Wannsee Conference in January 1942 to plan the killing of European Jews. He was assassinated six months later, in June 1942, and as a reprisal the SS destroyed the Czech village of Lidice and murdered its 340 inhabitants.

Eichmann, who presented details of the numbers of Jews involved: some 11 million. The conference considered the problems of transporting such large numbers of Jews, and the most effective way of dealing with them when they arrived at the extermination camps that were opening in occupied Poland. 'The talk,' Eichmann said, 'was of killing, elimination, and annihilation.'⁷⁸

Special camps were being built in the east, mostly near railway transport in order to speed up the movement of people, and the gassing of Polish Jews from the ghettos had already begun. The planners of the Final Solution had to determine the most efficient method of killing large numbers. Shooting, used by the Einsatzgruppen in Russia, was considered too slow. Gassing by carbon monoxide, from mobile gassing units using specially modified vans, had also proved unreliable.

There is no doubt what the order intended. When he stood 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'.⁷

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. The 'Final Solution' was the Nazis' code for the deliberate, planned killing or genocide of all European Jews. In fact, the killing of Jews in occupied Europe had begun long before – mobile killing squads were already slaughtering Jews in the occupied Soviet Union. The purpose of the Wannsee Conference was not to decide on the Final Solution – that decision had been made – but rather to find ways to expand the slaughter and make the killings more efficient.

One of the officials at the Wannsee Conference was SS leader Adolf

The men also evaluated the elimination of almost 70 000 mentally ill or physically disabled Germans who were killed in euthanasia centres. The systematic killing of these people had been ordered by Hitler in 1939, and it was only stopped, however briefly, when it became public knowledge in 1941.

The death camps

In 1941 and 1942 a series of extermination camps, including Auschwitz–Birkenau, Sobibor and Treblinka, were built, mostly 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. Many were 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, where the killing continued until the last days of the war. Approximately 6 million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis.

Much 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 June 1941 it also became an extermination camp.

Here, between 1942 and 1944, 1.1 million people were killed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, which were disguised as shower rooms and were capable of killing 2000 people at a time. The gas pellets were dropped down metal columns from the roof, giving off the deadly gas.

As the war continued, the transportation of Jews to places like Auschwitz and other death camps went on, despite 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.



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.

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 exhaustor 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*, Vallentine, London, 1953.



Disused containers of Zyklon B (poison gas pellets) found at the Majdanek death camp after the war



The arrival of a deportation train bringing Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz in 1944. The women and children have been separated from the men, and most of them would have been killed in the gas chambers soon after arrival.

Himmler speaks to leaders of the SS at Posen in October 1943

I also want to talk to you quite frankly about a very grave matter. We can talk about it quite frankly among ourselves and yet we will never speak of it publicly ... I am referring to the Jewish evacuation program, the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things which is easy to talk about ... Most of you will know what it means when a hundred corpses are lying side by side, or five hundred, or a thousand are lying there. To have stuck it out and, apart from a few exceptions due to human weakness, to have remained decent, that is what has made us tough. This is a glorious page in our history and one that has never been written and can never be written ... We had a moral right, we had a duty to destroy this people which wanted to destroy us ... All in all we can say that we have fulfilled this most difficult duty for the love of our people. And our spirit, our soul, our character has not suffered injury from it.

Nuremberg Document PS-1919.

As the war drew to a close and the Soviet armies advanced across eastern Europe in 1944, they began to arrive at the death camps in Poland, including Majdanek, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, and finally Auschwitz in January 1945. In their retreat the Germans had tried to destroy evidence of their crimes, and marched many of the survivors from these camps back into Germany.

The advancing Western powers of the United States and Britain came across many of these survivors from the east in the already-crowded concentration camps in Germany. At Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, which the British liberated in April 1945, 60,000 prisoners were found, barely alive and suffering from malnutrition and typhus. Some 10,000 of them died within a few weeks of liberation.



Bodies at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in an uncovered communal grave, found after British troops liberated the camp in April 1945

Up until 1939, Hitler's idea of a solution to the Jewish problem had been to drive the Jews out of Germany, mainly by emigration and forced expulsion. The war changed everything. Poland was occupied in September 1939 and the deliberate killing of Jewish communities in Poland began as soon as the Nazi armies crossed the border. The German invasion of Russia from June 1941 marked a major turning point as the German army overran vast areas of Russia in the summer of 1941. The emigration of German Jews was halted, and their deportation to the camps in eastern Europe began.

The deaths of Jews		
Country	Deaths	Percentage of pre-war population
Poland	3 000 000	90.9
Soviet Union	1 100 000	36.4
Hungary	569 000	69
Romania	287 000	47.1
Lithuania	143 000	85.1
Germany	141 500	25
Netherlands	100 000	71.4
Bohemia/Moravia	78 150	66.1
France	77 320	22.1
Latvia	71 500	78.1
Slovakia	71 000	79.8
Greece	67 000	86.6
Yugoslavia	63 300	81.2
Austria	50 000	27
Belgium	28 900	44
Italy	7680	17.3
Estonia	2000	44.4
Luxembourg	1950	55.7
Norway	762	44.8
Denmark	60	0.7

THE HISTORIAN'S DILEMMA

In the summer of 1944, militarily priceless railway carriages were criss-crossing Central Europe, carrying tens of thousands of Jews to their deaths. Many of these Jews were highly skilled workers: that did not matter. A second front had just opened in the West, and able-bodied German men were kept out of the fighting in order to kill Jews: that, too, did not matter. The focus on this racial enemy was so intense that even with Soviet guns within earshot in January 1945, the SS did not simply abandon Auschwitz and run, but methodically gathered the few remaining prisoners together and marched them deep into central Germany. The war was lost, a Nazi future an impossibility, yet the killing of Jews continued ...

Nowhere else did a modern state so concentrate its scientific, economic and bureaucratic resources on killing for killing's sake ... Once they had decided sometime in 1941 physically to eliminate the Jews, Nazi functionaries attempted to find and kill every Jew they could get their hands on, in and beyond Europe.

More troubling still is that when the mass killings did begin, they appeared to come out of nowhere. Historians have yet to find a document from Hitler ordering them to start. SS units

that followed German troops into the Soviet Union in 1941 had orders to shoot only Bolshevik commissars and Jewish men, though in late August some units began to include Jewish women and children. Hitler approved this escalation only after the fact ... The first experiments with Zyklon-B gas, the construction of the first crematoria, the use of gas vans: all were the result of local initiatives in the summer and autumn of 1941 ... The historian's dilemma is that the Holocaust seems to have been two things at the same time: on the one hand, the most implacable slaughter executed by any dictatorial state; on the other, a set of measures that emerged suddenly and without any explicit order from the very top. In a sense this dilemma is a creation of the historians themselves.

John Connelly, 'Rule by Inspiration', *London Review of Books*, vol. 27, July 2005.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What does the source reveal about the nature and operation of the Final Solution?
- 2 In your own words, explain what Connelly means by the 'historian's dilemma'?

Adolf Eichmann at his interrogation by Israeli police, 1960

I think the war against the Soviet Union started in June 1941. And I think it must have been two months later that Heydrich ordered me to come and see him. I went and he said to me 'The Führer has ordered the physical extermination of the Jews'. He said this sentence to me and then, quite contrary to his habit, paused for a long time as if he wanted to test the effect of these words on me. At first I could not grasp the implications because he chose his words carefully. But then I understood and said nothing further because there was nothing more I could say.

Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds.),
Documents on Nazism 1919–1945,
Jonathan Cape, London, 1974, p. 1105.



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. He was hanged in May 1962.

Getty Images/The LIFE Picture Collection/Gjon Mili

The historical debate

No serious historian has ever doubted that Hitler knew of and approved the Final Solution, although there is no direct document linking Hitler to any order for the destruction of the Jews. Given the way Hitler operated, this is not surprising. The question that most historians have tried to understand is, who ordered the extermination of Europe's Jews and when was this decision made? This question led to a major historical debate that began in the 1970s between historians of the Holocaust.

The intentionalist argument

Intentionalist historians, including German historians Karl Dietrich Bracher and Eberhard Jäckel, are identified with the so-called intentionalist school, and 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 Hitler meant everything he said about the Jews. It was a program of extermination that was *intentionally* pursued. Intentionalist historians stress the ideological zeal and virulent anti-Semitism of leading Nazis. The fact that no clear documentation has been found is not the key issue. No Nazi leaders wanted to put in writing references to deliberately planned mass killing, and verbal instructions were enough. When documents were created, the Nazi leadership used a particular style of language to conceal their actions – words like ‘resettlement’, ‘evacuation’, ‘special solution’, ‘special treatment’ and ‘special tasks’.

In 1941, under the cover of war and victory in the east, Hitler deliberately ordered the process to begin. Lucy Dawidowicz, in her book *The War Against the Jews*, argues that the plan to destroy the Jews was always part of Hitler’s thinking. ‘There never had been any ideological deviation or wavering determination,’ she writes. ‘In the end only the question of opportunity mattered.’⁹ That opportunity came in 1941 as the Germans occupied large areas of eastern Europe.

Another historian, Saul Friedländer, in his book *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (1997), is also in the intentionalist school. He has 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 structuralist argument

During the 1980s historians began to look at the Nazi era in greater depth, using newly available German archives. With an emphasis on this ‘grassroots material’, a new view was offered that shifted from the intentionalist view (that it was all ‘from above’ and very much centred on Hitler’s intent), suggesting that it was vital to study the ‘history from below’, with a closer examination of the structures and systems at work, in order to gain a better understanding of the Nazi state. This includes an understanding of the Holocaust.

German scholars like Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, who see the issue as a good deal more complex, favoured this so-called structuralist interpretation. Structuralist historians argue that the Holocaust is best understood by looking at the way the Nazi state and its power structures operated, and how this resulted in increasing radicalisation of measures against the Jews, ultimately ending in genocide.

They argue that the Final Solution was not triggered by some general order or by long-term planning; rather, it came about because of the increasing radicalisation of the Nazi state and the conflict and competition between individuals and different agencies. Hitler’s lack of interest in the decision-making process and day-to-day government contributed to this. Hitler’s racial views were well known, and the racial policy evolved with its own momentum. This radicalisation increased even more during the war, particularly after the invasion of the Soviet Union from 1941. The violence against the Jews in Poland and the activities of the Einsatzgruppen were examples of this. The structuralists suggest that, as attempts to find other solutions to the Jewish question failed, the Final Solution simply evolved, rather than being deliberately planned in advance. As part of this argument, there is the suggestion that ‘the Final Solution was not so much willed and decreed by Hitler as improvised by the bureaucrats [officials]; competing for favour in Hitler’s eyes, they devised a solution to their leader’s “Jewish problem” as a means of shoring up their own position within the corridors of power’.¹⁰

The intentionalist/structuralist debate over the Holocaust was at its most intense during the 1980s. In the opinion of Adam Tooze, one of the new generation of historians on Nazi Germany, our understanding of the Holocaust and the inner workings of German society under National Socialism has been transformed over the last 20 years. What has emerged has been an understanding of the origins of the Holocaust that recognises the importance of both structure and intent, the blending of aspects from both interpretations to create the so-called 'moderate structuralist' view.

Among the historians who support this position are Ian Kershaw and, more recently, Christopher Browning in his book *The Origins of the Final Solution* (2004). In a merging of the two positions, Browning has argued that the decision to kill Europe's Jews emerged out of changing circumstances brought about by the war against Russia from 1941, but that it was also influenced by the rabid and unchanging anti-Semitic views of men such as Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels, and their intent to constantly radicalise anti-Jewish policy. In Browning's view, Hitler made up his mind about the killing of the Jews in July 1941, at the peak of these huge military victories in Russia. The Wannsee Conference of January 1942 was in fact an organisational planning meeting to consign Europe's Jews to these extermination camps, and from 1942 the killing never ceased.

Ian Kershaw also sees the radicalisation of anti-Jewish policy and, ultimately, the genocide as linked to the 'working towards the Führer' concept. Nazi Germany was increasingly radicalised as various agencies within the Nazi system constantly competed for Hitler's attention. The progressive radicalisation of policy against the Jews was part of this.

CHRISTOPHER BROWNING AND THE ORIGINS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Few historians now think Hitler, insane Jew-hater as he was, planned the gas chambers before he even came to power. But neither do they think that struggles inside the Nazi structure led to Auschwitz almost without conscious human agency. The decision for total extermination was against the background of a driving impetus to radicalise racial policy which derived ultimately from Hitler. The centre almost never issued direct orders. But local commanders, whether SS officers or administrators in occupied territory, always sensed that more extreme action on the ground would find approval above them ...

The decisive impulse was the euphoria of victory in Russia, in the summer of 1941. It was the sense that they were invincible which persuaded the Nazis that the genocide of Soviet Jews, which they were already carrying out, could be extended to the Jews of every nation they controlled ...

Even Browning's researches have not turned up the fatal Hitler order. Probably none existed. That was not his way. Hitler preferred 'the best man, who bothers him least', henchmen who read his mind but took their own initiative. He filled the air with fearsome innuendo, but left it to junior figures to put into practice what they sensed he wanted – and what they wanted too. Afterwards, he would exult and take the credit.

Neal Ascherson, 'Review of Christopher Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*', *The Observer*, 23 May 2004.

QUESTIONS

- 1 When does Browning believe that the decision was made to implement the Final Solution?
- 2 Why would there have been 'euphoria' in 1941?
- 3 Which parts of the extract would fit with Kershaw's concept of 'working towards the Führer'?

WARTIME TREATMENT OF THE JEWS

- ◆ The outbreak of World War II and the German invasion of the Soviet Union brought millions of Jews under Nazi control.
- ◆ The first stage of anti-Semitic actions, particularly in Poland, was the policy of ghettoisation, where Jews were separated from the normal community.
- ◆ By 1941, special units known as the Einsatzgruppen, formed within the SS for the sole purpose of killing Jews and other undesirables in the occupied territory of the east, had begun a policy of systematic killings.
- ◆ Nazi anti-Semitic policy progressively radicalised from a process of harassment and expulsion to mass extermination.
- ◆ The Wannsee Conference, held in January 1942, initiated planning for the Final Solution, the systematic killing of European Jews.
- ◆ Extermination camps were established, mainly in Poland, and Jews and other peoples whom the Nazis deemed *Untermenschen* (subhuman) were transported to them.
- ◆ This process continued until the end of the war.
- ◆ There has been a significant historical debate as to whether the Final Solution was planned from the start as part of Nazi policy (the intentionalist argument), or evolved as a solution to the Jewish question, as millions of Jews fell under the authority of the Third Reich (the structuralist argument).

- 1 Explain the meaning and purpose of the following.

i Final Solution	iii Sonderkommando
ii Einsatzgruppen	iv ghettos
- 2 What role did the Wannsee Conference play in the Holocaust?
- 3 Prepare a table with two columns, one headed 'Intentionalist historians' and the other 'Structuralist historians'. Prepare a summary of each interpretation of the Holocaust.
- 4 Prepare a 2–3 minute presentation for the class about one of the camps shown in the map on page 373. Your presentation should include:
 - i Key dates and personnel
 - ii Location
 - iii Type of camp, e.g. labour camp, extermination camp
 - iv Main groups who were interred at the camp, e.g. women, Gypsies, Jews, particular nationalities
 - v Role in the Holocaust
 - vi Survivors
 - vii Personal experiences (where available).

Use a range of visual sources to support your presentation.
- 5 Essay question: Account for the changing nature of the Holocaust.

12.4

THE END OF THE WAR, 1944–1945

The Battle of Kursk, July 1943

The last great German offensive on the eastern front was fought in July 1943. Five Russian armies were concentrated in a bulge on the eastern front near the city of Kursk, and the German High Command saw the opportunity for an offensive battle to encircle these forces. Plans were drawn up for 'Operation Citadel' involving air power, more than 900 000 soldiers and a force of more than 2700 tanks, including the newly available Tiger tank.

After many delays that worked against the Germans, the battle fought in July–August 1943 became the greatest tank battle in history. Ultimately, the German forces could not stop the onslaught of the Red Army, and were forced to withdraw from battle. The battle had engaged 6000 tanks, almost 4000 aircraft and close to 2 million troops.

After the Battle of Kursk, Germany was unable to launch any more offensives in the east. The war against the Soviet Union, which Hitler had called into being in 1941, had failed. From now on the German forces in the east, weakened and increasingly demoralised, could only mount a series of defensive actions to slow down the Red Army's march towards Germany.

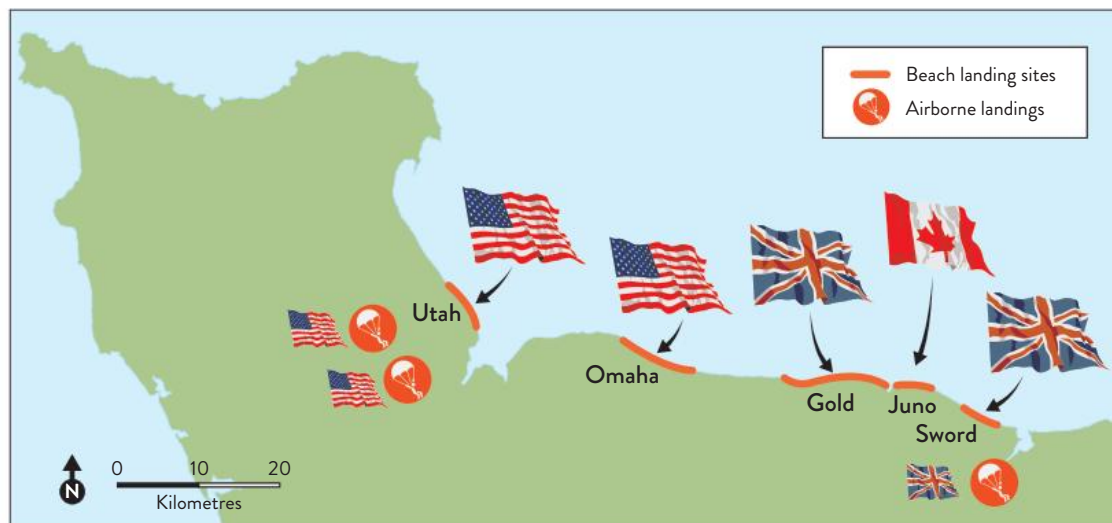
D-Day: The Normandy Landing

As the Russians turned the tide of war in the east, the Allied forces prepared for a massive invasion in the west. By 1944 an enormous force of almost 3 million men, 4000 vessels and 11 000 aircraft had assembled on the southern coast of Britain. They were all part of 'Operation Overlord', the Allied invasion of Europe.

The attack on Hitler's so-called Fortress Europe (*Festung Europa*), the largest naval, air and land operation in history, began on 6 June 1944 (D-Day). At 6.30 that morning, 25 000 British, American and Canadian troops, backed by airborne forces, landed on five beaches on the Normandy coast in northern France, codenamed Utah, Omaha, Gold, Juno and Sword. The Germans had prepared for the Allied invasion by constructing massive fortifications, known as the Atlantic Wall, along the



D-Day



The five beaches on the coast at Normandy, northern France, where the Allied forces landed on 6 June 1944



imagefolk/May Evans/Robert Hunt Library

One of the landing points on the Normandy coast on 14 July 1944. US transport and landing craft deliver reinforcements and supplies.

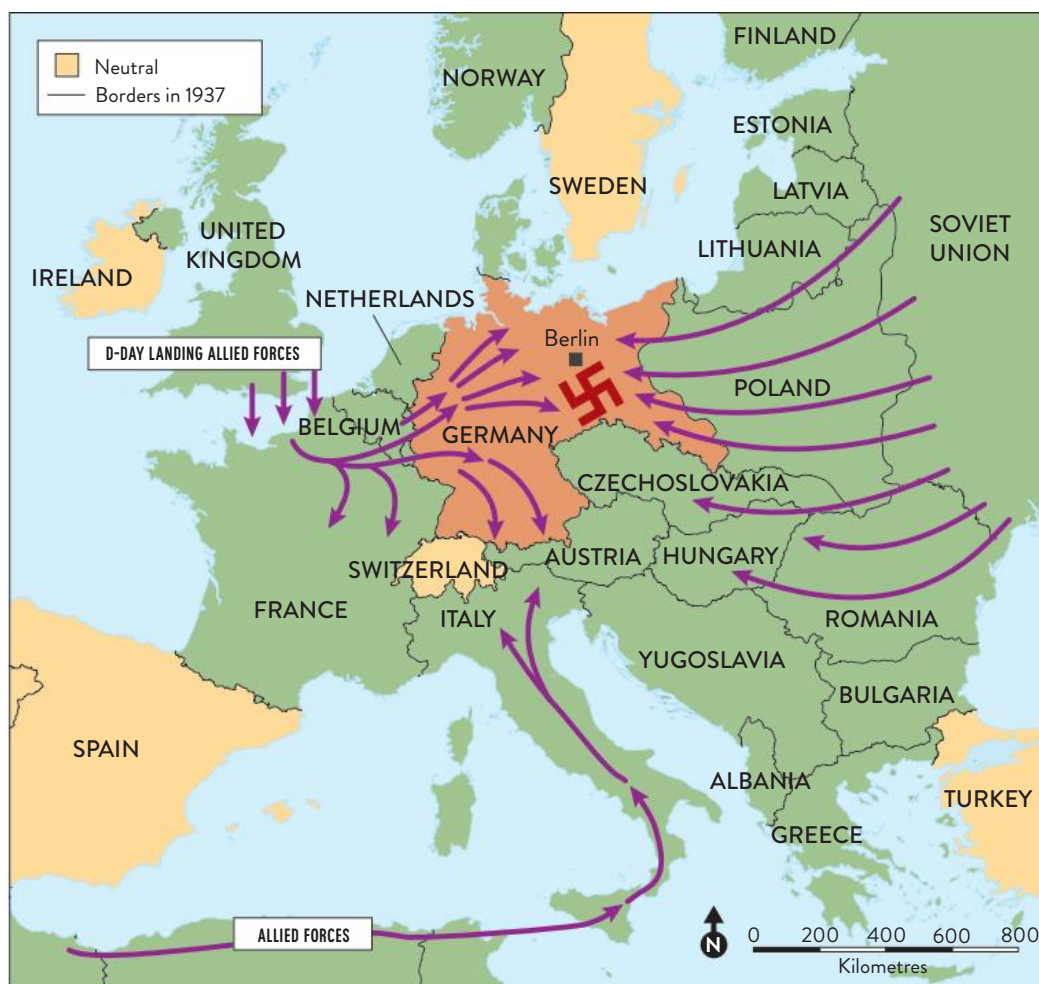
coast, and expected the attack to come at the narrowest point between Britain and France, at the Pas-de-Calais. But the Allies had achieved the vital element of surprise that they needed, and despite determined German resistance, the landing succeeded. By the end of the first day the invading force had established a foothold along the coast and could begin their advance into France. Within four weeks of the landing, another million men had followed.

In August 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 Allies starting their move from the west.

The defeat of Nazi Germany

On the same day that the Allies landed at Normandy, another Allied army entered the city of Rome. From their positions in North Africa after the defeat of Rommel, the British and Americans had invaded Sicily in July 1943. The Germans sent reinforcements to Italy, and there was heavy fighting as the Allied forces pushed their way up towards the Italian capital.

By 1944, as cities were bombed and the enemy advanced towards the borders of Germany, Hitler no longer appeared in public and refused to visit the ruined cities of his Reich. In 1944 the *Volkssturm*, a national force for home defence, was set up on Hitler's orders. All able-bodied males aged between 16 and 60 could be forced to take part. It was all part of the concept of 'total war'; in the last desperate months of the war, Germany had to rely on young boys and old men as part of the defence forces. By the end of the war close to 175 000 members of the *Volkssturm* were dead.



The defeat of Nazi Germany

German wartime morale

The majority of the German people remained loyal to the regime throughout the war. As the situation grew worse and early victories gave way to defeats, Goebbels, who proved the most loyal of Hitler's supporters, came into his own, appearing at rallies and making speeches. He took the lead in urging the German people not to accept defeat. But 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 no longer believed in victory, their loyalty to the nation meant they refused to give in.

In 1944 Goebbels became obsessed with the production of *Kolberg*, a feature film about the German people's defence of their land from Napoleon more than a century earlier. The idea of the heroic resistance of Kolberg's citizens was expected to inspire the German people in their now-desperate struggle against the advancing Allies. Goebbels spared no expense on the film. At a time when all labour was vital for the war effort, more than 10 000 costumes were made. The fake snow was provided by 100 railway wagons of salt, and Goebbels even withdrew 187 000 soldiers from the front to be used as extras in the battle scenes of the film. By the time the film was completed in 1945, the war was almost over.

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 Germany's ability to continue the war.

One issue that has been the subject of increasing historical research is why the war did not end earlier, given that 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 enemies ranged from people committing major crimes such as sabotage or desertion, to anyone who voiced criticism of the government or the war effort, engaged in defeatist talk, listened to foreign broadcasts on the radio or even joked 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 imposed the death sentence frequently. The number of people in concentration camps also increased rapidly during the war years, many of them from the occupied territories under German control.

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 advanced towards Germany's borders, Hitler no longer appeared in public and refused to visit the ruined cities of his Reich, but the bond of loyalty remained and Hitler's control did not diminish. Only when Hitler was dead and that bond was gone was it possible to end the war. Within a week of Hitler's suicide, the Germans accepted unconditional surrender.



Loyal to the end: Nazi German Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels congratulates a young soldier, a member of the *Volkssturm*, after he received the Iron Cross during the last weeks of World War II.

Hitler as a military commander

Hitler's overwhelming preoccupation from 1939 to 1945 was waging war, and there is no doubt that Hitler was responsible for all the major war decisions. He surrounded himself with military men who were not prepared to oppose his decisions or question his judgement. 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.

Hitler was not without military skills. Those who knew him were amazed at his memory, his grasp of detail and his understanding of weaponry. But he lacked military experience and the ability to handle great armies in the field. The fact that Germany was fighting on many fronts reinforces General Rommel's view that Hitler had a poor understanding of overall strategy. Unlike other great military commanders, he also lacked humanity. In his world, where struggle and force were part of life, the enormous loss of human life and the suffering of war meant very little.

Germany's early military victories in the west in 1940 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, in the end, reasoned argument and analysis became impossible. He refused to surrender ground when the military situation was hopeless, ordering troops to stand when a more rational strategy would have been to withdraw. He refused to accept the reality of the situation, believing that one could overcome reality simply by refusing to admit its existence.



Hitler's leadership

As always, he held to his belief in the power of the will. This absolute belief in willpower, according to the Panzer leader General Guderian, was Hitler's most significant quality. As a military commander, he 'compelled men to follow him'.¹¹ What is extraordinary is that, to the very end, Hitler's hold over the German military and the conduct of the war remained absolute.

HITLER'S FAILURE AS A WAR LEADER

HISTORIAN STUDY

Hitler was responsible for the war but also for its premeditated timing in terms of German rearmament ... the decision to attack the Soviet Union in 1941 was Hitler's, taken in the face of his generals' doubt ... the decision to advance on Stalingrad in 1942 as well as into the Caucasus was Hitler's. The decision that the encircled Sixth Army should stay put in Stalingrad was Hitler's. Similar stupid orders to generals in Africa, Russia and Normandy to stand fast instead of retreating in good time were Hitler's. Here in Hitler himself is reason enough for Germany's defeat.

Correlli Barnett, 'Numbers do Matter, Review of Richard Overy's *Why the Allies Won*',
Times Literary Supplement, 18 August 1995.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the main point being made in this document extract.
- 2 Select one of the military events mentioned in this source. Prepare a summary explaining how the military failure contributed to the collapse of Germany.

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 Hitler's death 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 Rastenberg, 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 minutes later, an explosion destroyed the meeting place and killed three people. Hitler was injured, but survived. This attempt on Hitler's life outraged many Germans and reaffirmed support for the regime.

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 were sent to concentration camps. Among those to die was Field Marshal Rommel, who knew of the conspiracy. He was allowed to poison himself.



Stauffenberg Bomb Plot



Hitler visiting officers who were wounded in the attempt on his life on 20 July 1944

Defeat, 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. In March the Allied armies crossed the Rhine River, the last natural barrier into the heart of Germany.

'If the war is lost the German nation will also perish,' Hitler told Speer in 1945. 'There is no need to take into consideration the basic requirements of the people for continuing even the most primitive existence ... in any case only those who are inferior will remain after this struggle, for the good have already been killed.'¹² Hitler ordered a **scorched-earth policy**, but Albert Speer countermanded the order.

In January 1945 Hitler returned to Berlin, and from his **bunker** beneath the garden of the ruined Reich Chancellery 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 moving and 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.'¹³

On 16 April the Soviet offensive to take Berlin began. Resistance to the Russian advance was determined, and at times fanatical. By the time Berlin fell, more than 100 000 Russians had been killed.

On 30 April Russian troops took the Reichstag building and hoisted their flag from its roof. That same afternoon, less than a kilometre away, Hitler committed suicide with a pistol shot to the head. His death was announced on German radio the following day: 'It is reported from the Führer's headquarters that our Führer Adolf Hitler, fighting to the last against Bolshevism, fell for Germany this afternoon in his operational headquarters in the Reich Chancellery.'

The war in Europe officially ended one week later, on 8 May 1945, with the total and unconditional surrender of all German forces.



In this photo, believed to be the last picture taken of Hitler, he is shown with his adjutant Julius Schaub, standing in the ruins of the Chancellery in Berlin in April 1945. Hitler committed suicide soon after, on 30 April 1945.

'WHY HITLER'S GRAND PLAN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR COLLAPSED' – PROFESSOR RICHARD EVANS



Defeat

The fundamental problem facing Hitler was that Germany simply did not have the resources to fight on so many different fronts at the same time ...

By the end of 1941 the Reich had to contend not only with the arms production of the British Empire and the Soviet Union but also with the rapidly growing military might of the world's economic superpower, the United States.

Above all, the Reich was short of fuel. Romania and Hungary supplied a large proportion of Germany's needs. But this was not enough to satisfy the appetite of the Wehrmacht's gas-guzzling tanks and fighter planes.

The most dramatic and most significant reversal of German fortunes came, however, on the eastern front. The sheer scale of the conflict between the Wehrmacht and the Red Army dwarfed anything seen anywhere else during the Second World War. From 22 June 1941, the day of the German invasion, there was never a point at which less than two-thirds of the German armed forces were engaged on the eastern front. Hitler had expected the Soviet Union, which he regarded as an unstable state, ruled by a clique of 'Jewish Bolsheviks', exploiting a vast mass of racially inferior and disorganised peasants, to crumble as soon as it was attacked. But it did not.

On the contrary, Stalin's patriotic appeals to his people helped rally them to fight in the 'great patriotic war', spurred on by horror at the murderous brutality of the German occupation. More than one million people died in the siege of Leningrad; but it did not fall. Soviet reserves of manpower and resources were seemingly inexhaustible. In a vast effort, major arms and munitions factories had been dismantled and transported to safety east of the Urals. Here they began to pour out increasing quantities of military hardware. In the longer run, the Germans were unable to match any of this; even if some of their hardware, notably the Tiger and Panther tanks, was better than anything the Russians could produce, they simply could not get them off the production lines in sufficient quantities to make a decisive difference.

The Red Army around Stalingrad was threatening to cut off the German forces in the Caucasus, so they were forced to withdraw, abandoning their attempt to secure the region's oil reserves. From this moment on, the German armies were more or less continuously in retreat on the eastern front. In early July 1943 came the last great German counter-attack, at Kursk. This was the greatest land battle in history, involving more than four million troops, 13 000 tanks and self-propelled guns, and 12 000 combat aircraft ...

These events had a devastating effect on German morale at home. In particular the catastrophe of Stalingrad began to convince many Germans that the war could not be won.

By the end of 1943 ... the Reich had lost command of the skies and the seas. Ever more devastating bombing raids on a growing range of towns and cities were making people's lives unbearable. Ordinary Germans knew by the end of 1943 that the war was lost.

Richard Evans, 'Why Hitler's grand plan during the Second World War collapsed', *The Guardian*, 8 September 2009.

QUESTIONS

- 1 If, as Evans suggests, 'Ordinary Germans knew by the end of 1943 that the war was lost', explain why it took until 1945 before the war finally ended.
- 2 Using the source and your own knowledge, explain why Germany lost the war.

WHY GERMANY LOST THE WAR

- ◆ Germany failed to make adequate military and economic preparations for a long conflict.
- ◆ Germany failed to mobilise for 'total war' from the start of the conflict.
- ◆ Germany made the strategic mistake of opening a second front against the Soviet Union before the war in the west had been won.
- ◆ The technique of lightning war on the Soviet Union failed.
- ◆ Germany declaring war on the United States of America in December 1941 brought the world's greatest industrial power into the conflict.
- ◆ Germany was unable to equal or better the industrial and military power of the nations fighting against it.
- ◆ Germany's resources were weakened by its involvement in lesser theatres of war to support Mussolini's war policies.
- ◆ Hitler's dominance in the military decision-making and his unbreakable hold over the German people and the German military machine led to Germany's defeat.

- 1 'Until 1942 the German armed forces had known only victory, but from 1943 the tide turned.' Provide evidence to support this claim.
- 2 What was the *Volkssturm*? What does its formation suggest about the military situation in Germany by the end of 1944?
- 3 Research: The Stauffenberg Plot of July 1944 was one of a number of attempts to assassinate Hitler. What were some of the other assassination attempts? Why were they unsuccessful?
- 4 How did Joseph Goebbels help prolong the war?
- 5 Hitler often overruled his commanders. Prepare a list of Hitler's military successes and another of his failures. Based on these lists, what do you conclude about his abilities as a military commander?

12.5

AFTERMATH

Justice at Nuremberg

During the war the concept of bringing the leaders of the Third Reich to trial once the war ended had been discussed by the Allied leadership. President Roosevelt, in particular, was a strong advocate of setting up an International Tribunal. 'He was determined that the question of Hitler's guilt – and the guilt of his gangsters – must not be left open for future debate,' one of his advisers recalled. 'There must never be any question anywhere, by anybody, about who was responsible for the war and for the uncivilized war crimes.'¹⁴

The move to set up an International War Crimes Tribunal was not without its critics. Was it, for example, possible to conduct a fair trial if the judges were appointed by the victors?

However, the process went ahead, and between 1945 and 1949, 13 trials took place in the city of Nuremberg, once the setting for the great Nazi Party rallies. The most significant trial was the first one, which opened in November 1945.



Nuremberg trials



Twenty-one leaders of the Third Reich in the dock before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The trial lasted from November 1945 to October 1946.

Twenty-one leading figures of the Third Reich stood trial, including Hermann Göring, the second most powerful figure in the Nazi state. Others who stood trial included military figures such as Wilhelm Keitel, Karl Dönitz and Alfred Jodl, the former Chancellor Franz von Papen, who had helped Hitler into power in 1933, the German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Rudolf Hess, once Deputy Führer, and Albert Speer, Hitler's Armaments Minister.

The defendants faced a panel of eight international judges (two each from the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union and France), and each had their own lawyer of choice. The tribunal had decided on four charges: planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression and other crimes against peace; war crimes; crimes against humanity; and

conspiracy for the accomplishment of a crime against peace, although not all the defendants were charged with all four.

The opening of the International Military Tribunal attracted worldwide media attention, although after the first few months interest in the proceedings slowly waned.

In October 1946 the judges delivered their findings. All but three of the men were found guilty, and 11 of them were sentenced to death. The others were sentenced to prison for different terms, ranging from 10 years to life. The Nazi war criminals sentenced to death were executed by hanging on the night of 16 October 1946, except Hermann Göring, who committed suicide a few hours earlier. Albert Speer, Hitler's Armaments Minister, and Baldur von Schirach, the former leader of the Hitler Youth, were released in 1966 after serving 20 years. Rudolf Hess, sentenced to life imprisonment, was the sole inmate in Spandau Prison in West Berlin when he died in August 1987, aged 93.

In 1945 Germany faced total defeat and ruin. Unlike World War I, which ended when the German government negotiated an armistice with the enemy, World War II was fought to the bitter end.

The war had been fought to destroy the Nazi regime. This goal was achieved – Nazism died with Hitler. The surviving leaders of Hitler's Reich were rounded up, put to trial and many of them were executed. But the legacy of the regime could not be erased so easily.

The most visible legacy of the war was the physical destruction of much of Germany. The major cities had been bombed, and the transport and industrial structure was



A Soviet soldier hoists the communist flag over the ruins of the Reichstag building in Berlin in May 1945

in ruins. In 1918 Germany had been spared physical destruction, but this was not the case in 1945. In human terms, about 6.8 million Germans were dead, about 3.5 million of them civilians. Germany lost twice the number of military dead in World War II as it had in World War I. On a wider scale, the total loss of life among all the European nations at war numbered 40 million.

FROM THE BRITISH MILITARY HISTORIAN ANTONY BEEVOR

In the Second World War, the peoples who had suffered the most in Europe were those caught between the totalitarian millstones, and who died as a result of the interaction of the two systems. Since 1933, fourteen million had died in Ukraine, Belorussia, Poland, the Baltic states and the Balkans. The vast majority of the 5.4 million Jews killed by the Nazis came from those regions.

The Second World War, with its global ramifications, was the greatest man made disaster in history. The statistics of the dead – whether sixty or seventy million – are far beyond our comprehension. The sheer size of the numbers is dangerously numbing ... In addition to the dead, there were countless others who had been maimed both psychologically ... Having been given the mantle (function) of a 'good war,' the Second World War had loomed over succeeding generations far more than any other conflict in history.

Antony Beevor, *The Second World War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 2012, p. 781.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Explain the meaning of the reference to 'the totalitarian millstones'.
- 2 Why do you think Beevor has put the term 'good war' in inverted commas?
- 3 Explain what Beevor means when he says the war 'loomed over succeeding generations'.

Conclusion

Unlike after World War I, Germany did not survive World War II as a united nation. Defeated Germany was occupied and divided into four zones by the four major victorious powers – the Soviet Union, the United States, Britain and France. The last of these occupying troops would not 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 result of Germany's defeat was that half of Europe and half of Germany now lay under the effective control of the Soviet Union. Instead of the German army driving east, the Red Army had driven west.

World War II was, in fact, won by the two great outsiders, 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. Hitler brought them into the war when, in 1941, he attacked one and declared war on the other. They formed an uneasy alliance, and with the unlimited manpower of one and the vast industrial resources of the other, the final defeat of Nazi Germany was assured.

These two states had a common enemy in Nazism, and once that enemy was eliminated, as it was so totally in 1945, their partnership of convenience and necessity broke down. The world's great democracies had joined with a totalitarian power to destroy another totalitarian power, and the outcome would create new and very real problems for the world. The Soviet Union, with its superior military power, established its control over most of eastern Europe, and the United States came to provide military and economic support for the nations of western Europe. The map of Europe was

changed, and out of the 'hot' war of 1939–1945 was born the Cold War that would last until 1989, when the Soviet Union collapsed.

In 1949, upon the ruins of the old Germany, two German nations were established – the Federal West German Republic (West Germany), with American and Western support, and the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), controlled from the Soviet Union.

For the next 40 years (1949 to 1989) the two German nations survived, backed by the victorious powers of World War II that had created them. Democracy, which all Germans had lost in 1933, was restored in West Germany. East Germany became a communist state.

In this way, the impact of the 12 years of Nazi Germany did not die with the regime's defeat. That impact was finally erased by the momentous events that swept Europe in 1989 and 1990. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the eastern European states that had been subject to Russian control pushed for their freedom. 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 centred on the old Reichstag building in Berlin, which, more than any other building, has come to symbolise modern German history. From its balcony in 1918 Scheidemann declared Germany a republic, and it became the home of Germany's troubled democracy after World War I. In 1933 the Nazis used the fire in the Reichstag to set in train the events that would establish Hitler and his movement in absolute power. Not unexpectedly, this home of German democracy remained ruined and unused during the Third Reich. Fittingly, it was from the top of the Reichstag that Soviet soldiers hoisted the communist flag in May 1945, announcing to the world 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 to 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.



The Reichstag building in Berlin today

In 1990 the decision was made to once again make the Reichstag 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.

- 1 Why were the Nuremberg Trials held?
- 2 Research: What does 'ex post facto' mean? How does this term relate to the Nuremberg Trials?
- 3 Research: 21 key Nazis were tried in the first Nuremberg Trial. Pick one of these figures and summarise:
 - i their role in the Third Reich and in the Holocaust
 - ii the verdict and sentence handed down
 - iii their life after release (if applicable).

HSC-STYLE ESSAY QUESTIONS

- 1 Create a timeline of Germany's involvement in the war, focusing on why the key battles were important in the course of the war.
- 2 Use a mind map or other visual organiser to summarise why the Germans lost the war.
- 3 Outline and account for the changing nature of Nazi racial policy.
- 4 Explain why the German homefront didn't collapse in 1944 or 1945.
- 5 Collect 10–12 primary sources on the German homefront. Cover how it changed during the war, using a range of source types and experiences.
- 6 Explain why the Nuremberg Trials were important.
- 7 Imagine you are reporting on the verdict of one of the Nuremberg Trials for a newspaper in Australia. Write a 500-word article that includes quotes from the defendant and/or prosecutors and/or judges.
- 8 The Russians reached Berlin before the other Allies. What impact did this have on postwar Germany?

Endnotes

- 1 Winston Churchill, quoted in Alistair Horne, *To Lose a Battle: France 1940*, Penguin Books, London, 1969, p. 597.
- 2 Alan JP Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin Books, London, 1964, p. 336.
- 3 Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1973, p. 308.
- 4 James McMillan, *Five Men at Nuremberg*, Harrap, London, 1985, p. 322.
- 5 Quoted in Roger Moorhouse, *Berlin at War*, Vintage Books, London, 2011, p. 318.
- 6 Anthony Rhodes, *Propaganda: The Art of Persuasion*, Angus & Robertson, London, 1976, p. 26.
- 7 Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Heinrich Himmler*, Heinemann, London, 1965, p. 119.
- 8 Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (eds), *Documents on Nazism 1919–1945*, p. 850.
- 9 Quoted in Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, Edward Arnold, London, 1985, p. 193.
- 10 Ronnie Landau, *Studying the Holocaust*, Routledge, London, 1998, p. 176.
- 11 Heinz Guderian, quoted in John Strawson, *Hitler as a Military Commander*, Sphere Books, London, 1971, p. 232.
- 12 Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Macmillan, London, 1970, p. 440.
- 13 Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, p. 727.
- 14 Quoted in Landsman Stephan, *Crimes of the Holocaust: The Law Confronts Hard Cases*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 2013, p. 6.

- 1 What do you understand by the following terms?
 - i *Lebensraum*
 - ii *Blitzkrieg*
 - iii *Volkssturm*
 - iv Appeasement
 - v scorched-earth policy
 - vi *Luftwaffe*
- 2 Place the following events in what you believe is their order of importance as key turning points in World War II. Select one of these events and prepare an extended response explaining why it was a turning point in the war.
 - The D-Day landing
 - Germany declaring war on the United States
 - The Battle of Britain
 - Germany invading 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 PowerPoint presentation on the event and its consequences.
- 4 Draw up a table with two columns, one titled 'Defeated Germany 1918–1919' and the other titled 'Defeated Germany 1945–1946'. Under each column, prepare a series of summary points that outline the treatment Germany received in 1918–1919 and in 1945–1946.
- 5 Class discussion: What is the legacy of World War II?
- 6 Essay question: Assess the role that Hitler played in Germany from 1933 to 1945.
- 7 Essay question: Explain the impact of Nazi racial policies on Germany and occupied territories between 1933 and 1945.

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The fourth edition of *Republic to Reich* has been updated to match the 2018 NSW Modern History Syllabus. It is also an excellent source for any study of Germany in the early 20th century.

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