

CHAPTER

# 3

## THE RISE OF NAZISM IN GERMANY

'Instead of working to achieve power by armed coup, we shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag against the opposition deputies. If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the results will be guaranteed by their own constitution. Sooner or later we shall have a majority, and after that—Germany.'

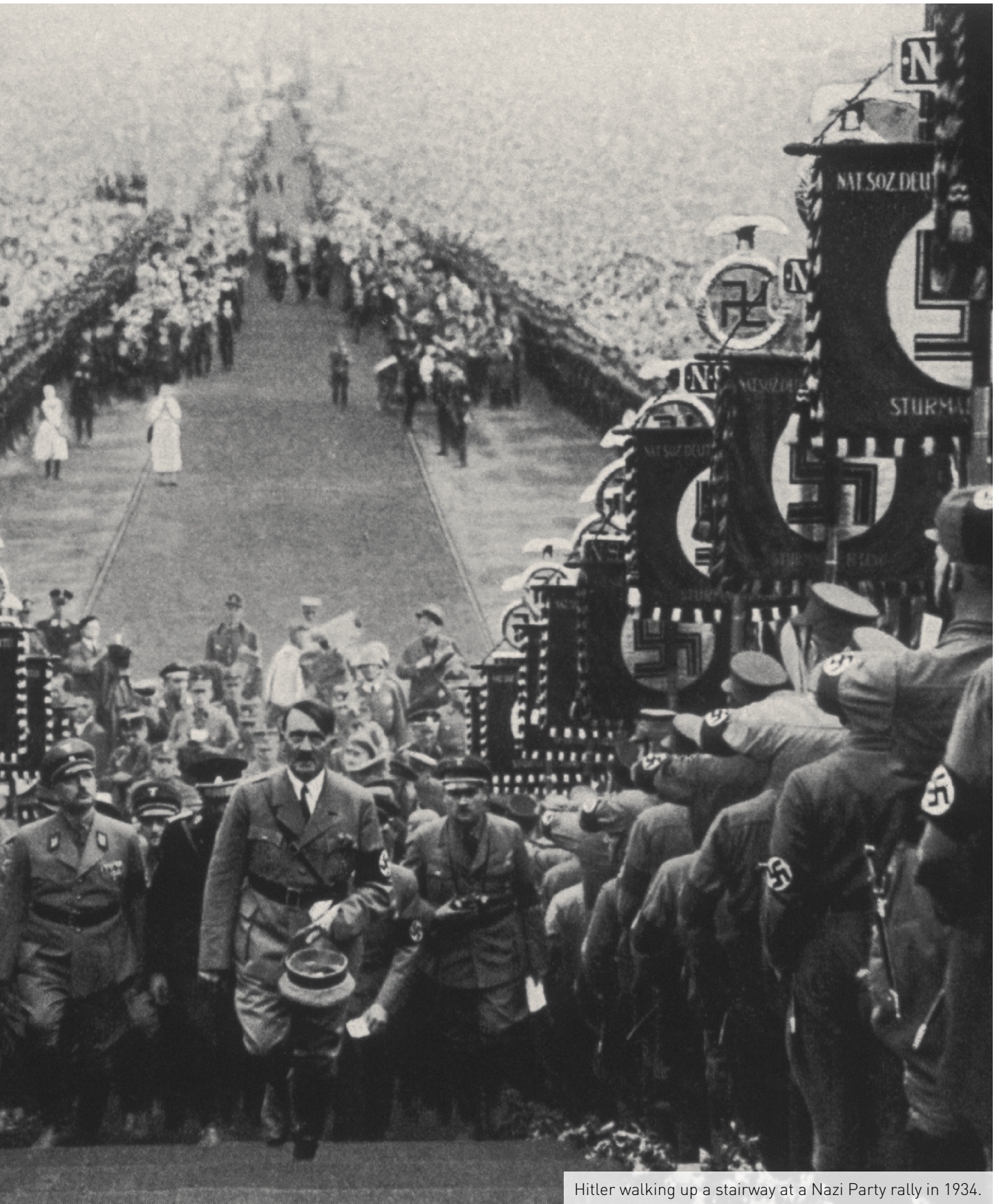
ADOLF HITLER

### INTRODUCTION

When Adolf Hitler shared the vision described above with a fellow Nazi Party member while serving time in Landsberg prison in 1924, he was no doubt convinced that he would one day become the absolute ruler of Germany. Less than ten years later, on 30 January 1933, Hitler was offered the position of chancellor by president Paul von Hindenburg. It would then take just eighteen months for Hitler to establish a dictatorship and declare himself *fürher* (leader) of the Third Reich.

Since the end of the World War II, historians have asked how a man like Hitler—a failed art student who never rose above the rank of corporal in World War I—was able to take power in such a highly cultured nation. A weak democratic tradition, economic chaos and the all-consuming ambition of the Nazi Party combined in the early 1930s to thrust Hitler onto the political stage—and provided a platform for his ideology of extreme nationalism and racial hatred.





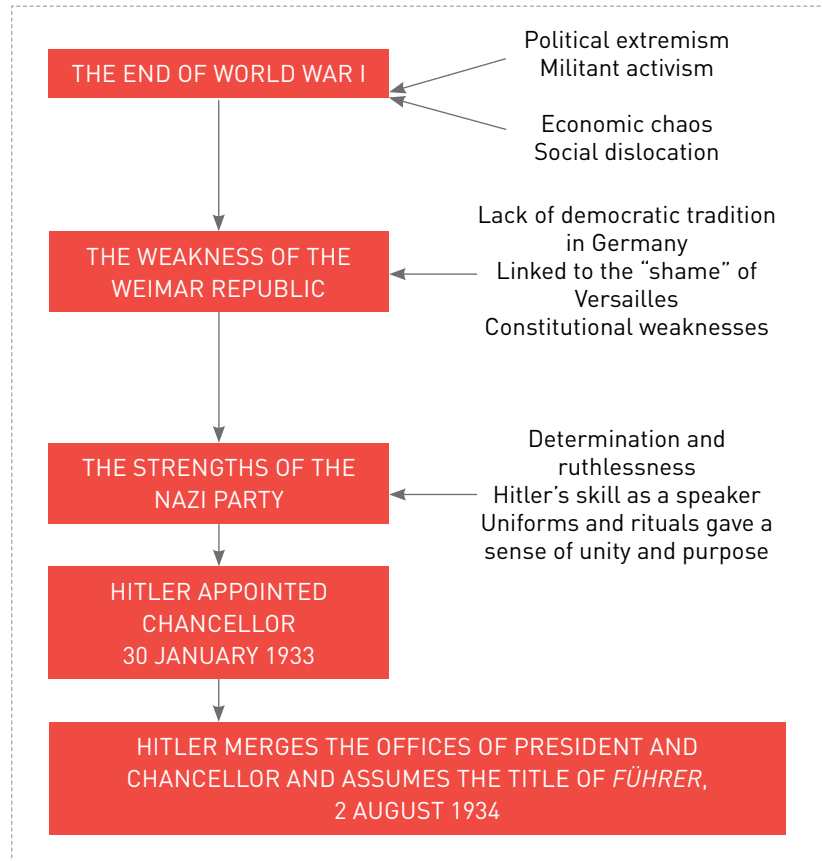
Hitler walking up a stairway at a Nazi Party rally in 1934.

# OVERVIEW

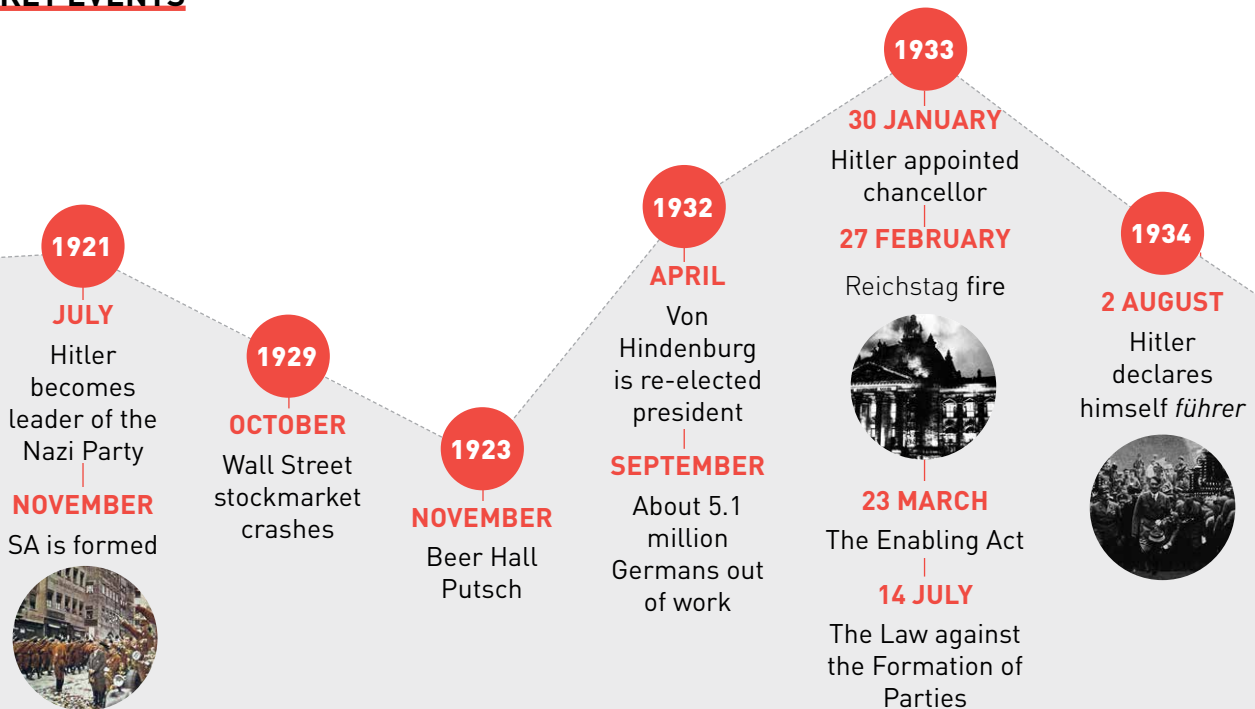
## KEY QUESTIONS

- How did the economic situation in Germany at the end of World War I cause problems for the Weimar Republic?
- What did the ideology of Hitler and the Nazi Party focus on?
- What talents did Hitler possess?
- Why did so many people vote for the Nazi Party?
- How did Hitler consolidate his dictatorship?

## IN THIS CHAPTER



## KEY EVENTS



## KEY PLAYERS

### ADOLF HITLER (1889–1945)

- Born in Austria on 20 April 1889
- Fought for Germany in World War I; awarded the Iron Cross First Class for bravery.
- Joined the DAP in 1919 and, renaming the party the NSDAP in 1921, became its leader.
- After a failed coup in 1923, resolved to take power through legal means.
- Expressed his ideology of nationalism, anti-semitism and racial purity in his book *Mein Kampf*.
- Was appointed chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933.
- Within eighteen months had consolidated power as a dictator.
- Committed suicide in Berlin on 28 April 1945.



### PAUL VON HINDENBURG (1847–1934)

- Commanded the German war effort during World War I.
- After retiring from the army, was persuaded to run for president in 1925. He won the election and was re-elected in 1932, beating Hitler by a clear margin.
- In the midst of social and economic upheaval, he appointed Hitler as chancellor of Germany on 30 January 1933. Upon Hindenburg's death on 2 August 1934, Hitler assumed the title of *Führer*.



### ERNST RÖHM (1887–1934)

- Served during World War I.
- Joined the DAP in 1919, where he met Hitler. The two quickly became close friends.
- Played an important role in recruitment for the *Sturmabteilung* (SA) and, with his army connections, provided weapons and equipment.
- On 30 June, in the 'Night of the Long Knives', Röhm and other leading members of the SA were executed on Hitler's orders. Hitler feared that the SA had become a threat to his own position.



## KEY TERMS

### CHANCELLOR

The head of the legislative body in the Weimar Republic; similar to a prime minister.

### NSDAP

An abbreviation of *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, or National Socialist German Workers Party. Commonly shortened to Nazi Party.

### REICHSTAG

The German national parliament; the main legislative decision-making body. The term also applies to the Reichstag building in Berlin, which housed the German parliament from 1894–1933 (and again from 1999 until the current day).

## HISTORICAL INQUIRY: CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

Some historians have suggested that circumstances in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s made the emergence of a dictator both possible and likely. Others have argued that Adolf Hitler possessed particular traits and abilities that made his rise to power inevitable. As you work through this chapter, consider both arguments. Use the material and ideas that you have developed to answer **one** of the following questions:

1. To what extent was Hitler just in the right place at the right time?
2. How important were Hitler's personal attributes in determining his rise to power in Germany?



# GERMANY IN THE WAKE OF WORLD WAR I

GENERAL ERICH LUDENDORFF: 'I was told ... of behaviour which, I openly confess, I should not have thought possible in the German army; whole bodies of our men surrendered to single troops.'

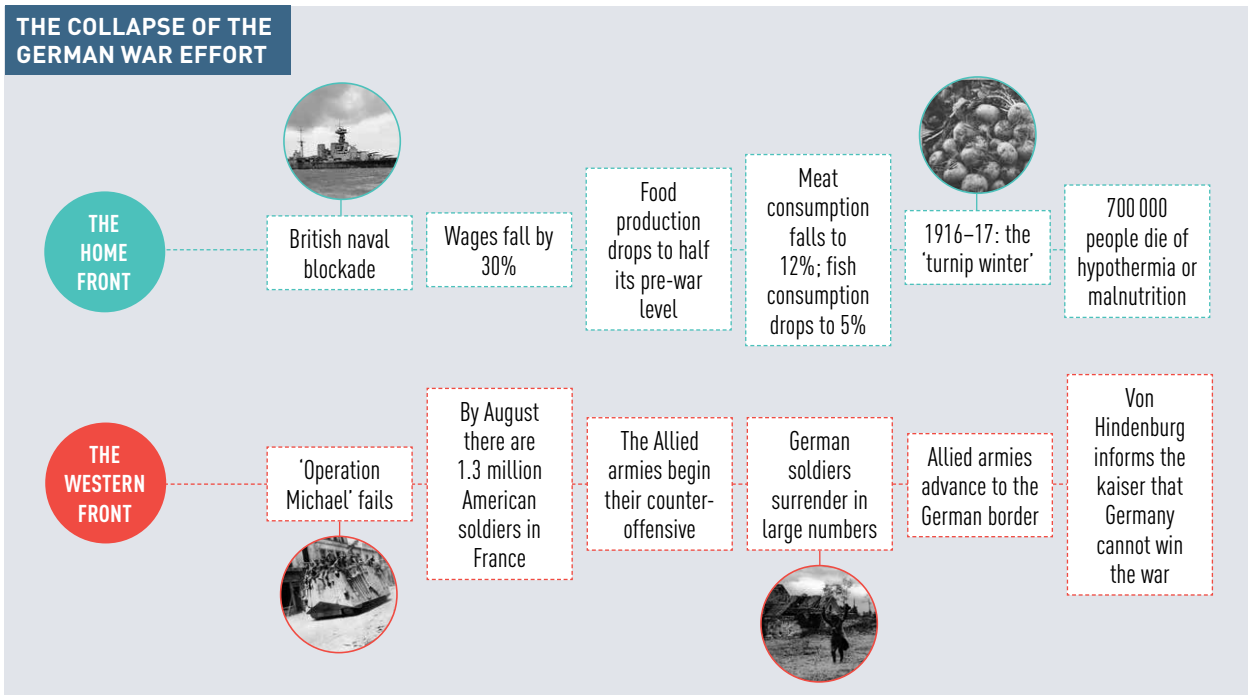
## DID YOU KNOW?

*Kaiser* is the German word for 'emperor.' It is derived from the Latin word *caesar*. The Russian word for 'emperor,' *tsar* (or *czar*) has the same origin.

## CHAOS AT THE FRONT AND AT HOME

When the armistice that ended the fighting on the Western Front was signed on 11 November 1918, Germany was in a state of political, social and economic turmoil. In an attempt to win the war before millions of American soldiers arrived in Europe, the German army launched a massive offensive on the Western front, called Operation Michael. Although it was initially successful, Allied troops eventually halted the German advance and began a counteroffensive. On 8 August 1918, Australian and Canadian troops launched a stunning attack that advanced 12 kilometres and captured 15 000 German soldiers. General Erich Ludendorff of the German High Command referred to this as 'the black day of the German army'.<sup>1</sup> Germany was now facing a series of crises that it could not overcome.

By the end of September 1918, the disastrous economic and military situation convinced the German High Command to seek peace terms. The Allies accepted the request—but only on the condition that Kaiser Wilhelm II was removed from power. With mutinies and strikes breaking out all over the country, a Soviet-style revolution seemed imminent. The Reichstag, led by Friedrich Ebert of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), demanded that the kaiser step down. On 9 November 1918, with massive strikes and protests in Berlin, Philipp Scheidemann, a member of the SPD, announced the abdication of the kaiser and the establishment of a German Republic. Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to the Netherlands on 10 November 1918 and remained there in exile until his death in



1940. A German delegation signed the armistice with representatives from the Allies the next day. The fighting on the Western Front was over—but a new series of problems was about to begin for Germany.

## THREATS FROM LEFT AND RIGHT

Germany had a new government but it was far from stable. Ebert was not sure if he had the support of the army and the German people. With workers, soldiers and sailors forming councils (known as the Republics of Councils or the Councils Movement)<sup>2</sup> to take control in many of Germany's major cities, Ebert's new national government did not even control all of Berlin. Ebert decided to hold national elections for a new government on 19 January 1919, but there was no guarantee that Ebert's hold on power would last even that long.



### ↑ SOURCE 3.01

German prisoners-of-war being watched by Australian soldiers, 1918.



THE SPARTACIST UPRISING



## THE FREIKORPS

### DID YOU KNOW?

A *putsch*, like a coup, is an illegal attempt to overthrow an existing government by force. In German it means 'knock' or 'thrust'.

The *Freikorps*, or Free Corps, consisted of groups of ex-soldiers recruited at the end of World War I to help the government put down uprisings. Its members were typically conservative and anti-communist; they were quite brutal in putting down left-wing coups in Berlin (January 1919) and Bavaria (April 1919). Freikorps soldiers were responsible for the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.<sup>3</sup> Some Freikorps units took part in the right-wing Kapp Putsch in March 1920, which meant that the units used to defend democracy had actually become a threat to the new republic!



### ➔ SOURCE 3.02

Freikorps troops supported by an armoured car and a flamethrower.

## ACTIVITY

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Who joined the Freikorps at the end of World War I?
2. Why did they join the Freikorps?
3. What does the presence of these troops in a city street suggest about the state of Germany in the aftermath of World War I?

## A TROUBLED BIRTH FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

To avoid the ongoing strife in Berlin, the new government first met in the town of Weimar on 6 February 1919 (see page 89). Friedrich Ebert had been chosen as the republic's first president but no political party had a clear majority in the Reichstag (German Parliament), the legislative body. Governments would have to rule through coalitions. Not only did these parties represent a wide range of political and economic ideologies, some were actively opposed to democracy and sought to bring down the republic from within.

## REICHSTAG ELECTION RESULTS

| PARTY    | JANUARY 1919 (423 SEATS) |                 | JUNE 1920 (459 SEATS) |                 |
|----------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|          | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE       | NUMBER OF SEATS | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE    | NUMBER OF SEATS |
| KPD/USPD | 7.6%                     | 22              | 19.7%                 | 84              |
| SPD      | 38%                      | 165             | 22%                   | 102             |
| DDP      | 18.5%                    | 75              | 8.3%                  | 39              |
| Zentrum  | 19.7%                    | 91              | 13.6%                 | 64              |
| DVP      | 4.4%                     | 22              | 13.9%                 | 65              |
| DNVP     | 10.3%                    | 44              | 15.1%                 | 71              |

## SOURCE 3.03

Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), 9 & 26.

## THE POLITICAL PARTIES OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC (1919–1933)

| PARTY   | PARTY NAME                                     | LEADERS  | POLITICAL STANDPOINT  |
|---------|--|--|---|
| KPD     | German Communist Party                         | Ernst Thälmann                                       | Extreme left-wing; anti-Weimar  |
| USPD    | Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany | Kurt Eisner  | Left-wing; broke with the SPD over use of the <i>Freikorps</i> during the Spartacist revolt |
| SPD     | Social Democratic Party of Germany             | Friedrich Ebert; Philipp Scheidemann; Hermann Müller | Largest left-wing party; pro-Weimar   |
| DDP     | German Democratic Party                        | Walther Rathenau                                     | Left-wing liberal; pro-Weimar   |
| Zentrum | Zentrum Party                                  | Matthias Erzberger; Heinrich Brüning                 | Catholic; liberal; anti-Marxist; pro-Weimar   |
| BVP     | Bavarian People's Party                        | Heinrich Held  | Split from Zentrum in 1920  |
| DVP     | German People's Party                          | Gustav Stresemann                                    | Right-wing liberal; became pro-Weimar   |
| DNVP    | German National People's Party                 | Karl Helfferich; Alfred Hugenberg                    | Conservative; monarchist; anti-Weimar   |
| NSDAP   | National Socialist German Workers' Party       | Adolf Hitler   | Extreme right-wing; racist; anti-Weimar   |

## SOURCE 3.04

Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), 10.

## ACTIVITY

## DISCUSSION

With a partner, discuss the significance of the information presented in Sources 3.03 and 3.04, as well as the annotated map on page 89. What chance would there have been of forming a workable government in Germany in 1919?



## THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

After the elections, the Weimar politicians faced a number of issues that demanded their immediate attention. The peace treaty—known as the Treaty of Versailles—was the first issue. The Paris Peace Conference began in January 1919 but, because of major disagreements between France, Great Britain and the United States, the peace treaty with Germany was only ready to be signed in June. Most Germans were appalled when the terms of the treaty were finally presented to them. They had been under the impression that the armistice would be based on the terms of Wilson’s Fourteen Points. However, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were much harsher.

Under the threat of a renewed Allied offensive and continuation of the naval blockade, the German delegation to Paris, led by Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, signed the treaty on 28 June 1919 at the Palace of Versailles. The clauses of the Treaty of Versailles were to have a devastating impact on the perception of democracy and the republic in Germany. The treaty became known as the *Diktat* in Germany, or ‘dictated treaty’, and gave rise to the ‘stab-in-the-back’ myth. This held that the German army had not been defeated by the Allied armies at the Western Front, but by politicians such as Ebert who, in November, had signed the armistice with the Allies.

A German soldier, upon hearing that Germany had signed the Treaty of Versailles, wrote: ‘We shivered from the terrible cold of abandonment. We had believed that our country would never betray us.’<sup>4</sup> There were swift political consequences for Germany. In the June 1920 Reichstag elections, held in the aftermath of the right-wing Kapp Putsch, support increased for anti-Versailles, anti-Weimar political parties. The extreme right-wing DNVP increased their vote from 10.3 per cent in January 1919 to 13.9 per cent in June. Pro-treaty parties found their voter support falling from 76 per cent to 47 per cent. It seemed that Weimar was a ‘republic without republicans.’<sup>5</sup> Years later, Hitler would use this simmering resentment against the so-called *Schmachfrieden* (shameful peace) of the Treaty of Versailles to propel himself to power.

### ACTIVITY

#### SKILLS: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

1. Explain why Germans were shocked by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.
2. Whom did many Germans blame for their defeat in World War I?
3. Explain how the treaty affected the way people voted in Germany. Which parties gained and lost voter support between these elections? Explain the factors that contributed to this change. Refer to Source 3.03 and the annotated map on page 89 in your response.

## THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION

In the wake of the Treaty of Versailles, the Weimar Republic had to draft the new German constitution. While the new constitution seemed to represent the best features of a modern, democratic republic, it also contained the seeds of the republic’s downfall. A great deal would depend on the willingness of politicians from the centre and moderate left- and right-wing parties to form coalitions and

keep extremist, anti-democratic parties such as the KPD and DNVP from having any influence. Article 48 of the constitution (see diagram below) could be used to defend the republic from its enemies. However, it could also become the means to ‘create an authoritarian government’.<sup>6</sup>

CHANCELLORS AND COALITION PARTNERS OF THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC (1919–1923)

| CHANCELLOR                      | DATE                        | COALITION PARTNERS      |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Friedrich Ebert (SPD)           | November 1918–February 1919 | Coalition of Socialists |
| Philipp Scheidemann (SPD)       | February 1919–June 1919     | SPD, Zentrum, DDP       |
| Gustav Bauer (SPD)              | June 1919–March 1920        | SPD, Zentrum, DDP       |
| Hermann Müller (SPD)            | March 1920–June 1920        | SPD, Zentrum, DDP       |
| Konstantin Fehrenbach (Zentrum) | June 1920–May 1921          | DDP, Zentrum, DVP       |
| Joseph Wirth (Zentrum)          | May 1921–October 1921       | SPD, DDP, Zentrum       |
| Joseph Wirth (Zentrum)          | October 1921–November 1922  | SPD, DDP, Zentrum       |
| Wilhelm Cuno (non-aligned)      | November 1922–August 1923   | DDP, Zentrum, DVP       |

**SOURCE 3.05**

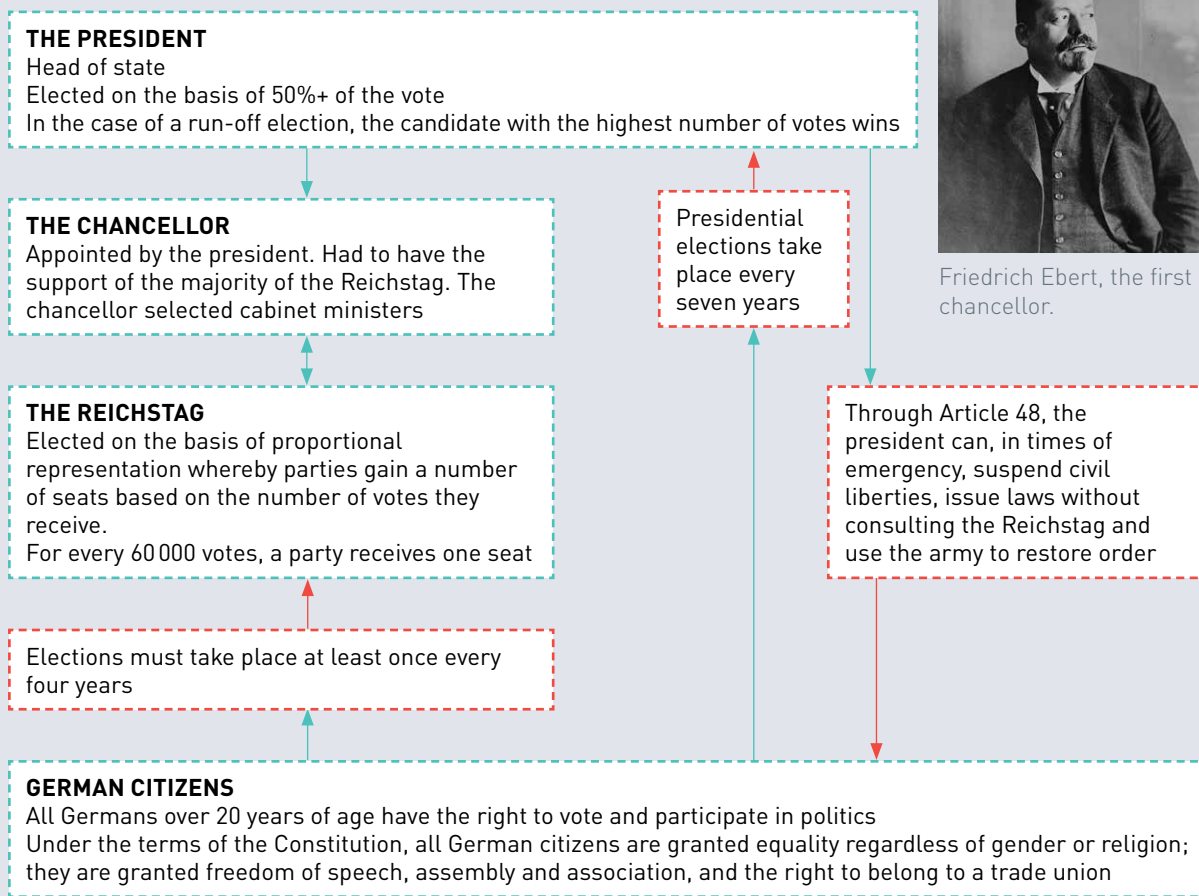
Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45 (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000)*, 10.

**SOURCE ANALYSIS**

In 200–300 words, explain the significance of the information in Source 3.05. What does it suggest about the nature of politics in Germany in the years 1919–1923?

ACTIVITY

**THE WEIMAR CONSTITUTION**



### DID YOU KNOW?

The number of seats in the Weimar parliament increased considerably from 423 in 1919 to 647 in 1933. This was because the number of seats was not fixed. Parties were granted a seat in the Reichstag for every 60 000 votes they received. So, the higher the voter turnout on election day, the more seats were offered.



### THE FRENCH OCCUPATION

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Ruhr region was the industrial heartland of Germany. After Upper Silesia had been ceded to Poland under the Treaty of Versailles, the Ruhr was responsible for 80 per cent of Germany's coal and steel production.

### DID YOU KNOW?

The specific pretext the French gave for moving their troops into the Ruhr was that Germany had failed to deliver a shipment of timber for telegraph poles.

## ACTIVITIES

### TABLE

Copy and complete this table based on the information in the diagram on the page 93.

| Features of the Constitution  | Strengths | Weaknesses |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Extending civil rights to all |           |            |
| Proportional representation   |           |            |
| The chancellor and cabinet    |           |            |
| The president                 |           |            |
| Article 48                    |           |            |

### CREATIVE WRITING

Imagine that you are an ex-German soldier, and it is the middle of 1919. Write a letter to the local newspaper expressing your views on everything that has happened since November 1918. Your letter must be based on real details of the Treaty of Versailles, the constitution, conflicts, people and events.

## THE FRENCH OCCUPATION OF THE RUHR

The new government, formed after the June 1920 elections, faced immediate pressure from the Allies to honour the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. The total amount of reparations announced in the London payments plan on 1 May 1921 was 132 billion gold marks (equivalent to £6.5 billion pounds or \$32 billion US dollars at the time).<sup>7</sup> Under threat of Allied invasion, the new German chancellor, Joseph Wirth, had no choice but to accept the terms. However, World War I had had a devastating effect on the German economy and having to make reparations made the problem worse. By the end of 1922, the German government had failed to meet its commitments under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, so the French government took decisive action.

Under the terms of the November armistice, the French army already had troops stationed in the Rhineland. On 11 January 1923 the French government, with Belgian support, ordered 60 000 soldiers to march into the Ruhr region and seize the material they were owed. The occupation was also intended to demonstrate France's resolve to uphold the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

A new German chancellor, Wilhelm Cuno, had been appointed in November 1922 (see Source 3.05). Cuno's response to the occupation was to encourage the miners and industrial workers in the Ruhr to engage in a campaign of passive resistance. This meant that the workers would refuse to work or, if they were forced, to work at a greatly reduced pace. The idea was to prevent the French from taking the region's valuable coal and iron reserves for themselves. The policy worked and the presence of a foreign enemy meant that Germans were united in a way they hadn't been united since August 1914.<sup>8</sup> However, there were unforeseen and severe consequences.

## OCCUPATION OF THE RUHR: TENSIONS BETWEEN GERMANY AND FRANCE

Occupation armies are rarely popular with the local population, and the French troops sent into the Ruhr were no exception. German workers, encouraged and assisted by the army, went on strike and engaged in acts of sabotage. The French retaliated. On 31 March, French soldiers killed thirteen workers at the Krupp factory in Essen and wounded forty-one people during a violent protest.<sup>9</sup> Overall, one hundred Germans were killed during the occupation and 100 000 Germans were expelled from the region.<sup>10</sup>



### ↑ SOURCE 3.06

The French occupation of the Ruhr, 1923. French soldiers set up a machine gun in front of a post office in Essen.

### ↶ SOURCE 3.07

German poster encouraging workers to use passive resistance. The caption reads: 'No! You cannot force me!'

## ACTIVITY

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Describe the appearance and demeanour of the French soldiers in Source 3.06.
2. What elements of Source 3.07 relate to the German response of passive resistance to the French occupation?
3. In 200–300 words, compare and contrast the two images. What are the similarities and differences between the two?
4. Explain the likely effect that the French occupation would have had on the German people's sense of national pride and their faith in the Weimar Republic.

DID YOU KNOW?

The value of the mark had fallen by so much by the autumn of 1923 that it cost more to print a banknote than the note was worth. The government was printing so many notes that they had to use newspaper presses to maintain the supply.



HYPERINFLATION IN GERMANY

## HYPERINFLATION AND ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

Prior to World War I, the German economy had been one of the world's strongest. This was based on plentiful resources such as coal and iron ore, a highly developed industrial base, a sophisticated education system and advanced banking techniques.<sup>11</sup> Germany also had a navy second only to Britain's. However, four years of total war had put enormous strain on the economy. Germany was forced to supply its allies with food and other materials, and the Allied naval blockade ensured that Germany could not import necessary supplies or export goods for payment. The German government paid for its war expenses by borrowing money—and soon the national debt began to soar. As industry concentrated on military supplies rather than consumer products, prices began to rise much faster than wages.

The situation was made worse by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. By handing over territory to other European nations—or to the League of Nations as mandated territory—Germany lost 75 per cent of its iron-ore reserves and 26 per cent of its coal reserves.<sup>12</sup> By 1919, the national debt was 144 000 million Deutsche marks, and by December 1922 this had reached 469 000 million marks. In order to reduce the debt level and make reparations payments without charging additional taxes, the Weimar government started printing more money. This only made the situation worse. The price of everyday goods, such as bread, started to rise faster than money could be injected into the economy (see Source 3.08). A vicious cycle of inflation had set in.

While the policy of passive resistance achieved its goal of denying France access to Germany's resources, it had a devastating effect on Germany's already struggling economy. Despite having almost no coal or iron ore to export, the government pledged to pay the workers' wages for the duration of the occupation. This forced the government to print even more money, which led to hyperinflation. There were so many Deutsche marks in circulation that they became worthless.

### SOURCE 3.08

Ben Walsh, *Modern World History* (London: John Murray, 2001), 143.

#### THE PRICE OF A LOAF OF BREAD IN BERLIN

| DATE           | PRICE (IN MARKS) |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1918           | 0.63             |
| 1922           | 163              |
| January 1923   | 250              |
| July 1923      | 3465             |
| September 1923 | 1 512 000        |
| November 1923  | 201 000 000 000  |

#### VALUE OF THE DEUTSCHE MARK COMPARED TO US DOLLAR

| DATE           | VALUE COMPARED TO US DOLLAR |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| July 1914      | 4.2                         |
| January 1919   | 8.9                         |
| January 1920   | 14.0                        |
| January 1921   | 64.9                        |
| July 1921      | 76.7                        |
| January 1922   | 191.8                       |
| July 1922      | 493.2                       |
| January 1923   | 17 792                      |
| July 1923      | 353 412                     |
| September 1923 | 98 860 000                  |
| November 1923  | 200 000 000 000             |

### SOURCE 3.09

Ben Walsh, *Modern World History* (London: John Murray, 2001), 143.



## THE CONSEQUENCES OF HYPERINFLATION

Because banknotes were worthless, people traded items they possessed for goods that they needed. This tended to favour wealthy people, who had more possessions to barter with. The government’s health minister noted that there was an increase in a range of ailments caused by a poor diet. In addition, crime, suicides and attacks on minority groups—such as German Jews—all increased.<sup>13</sup>

**top SOURCE 3.10**

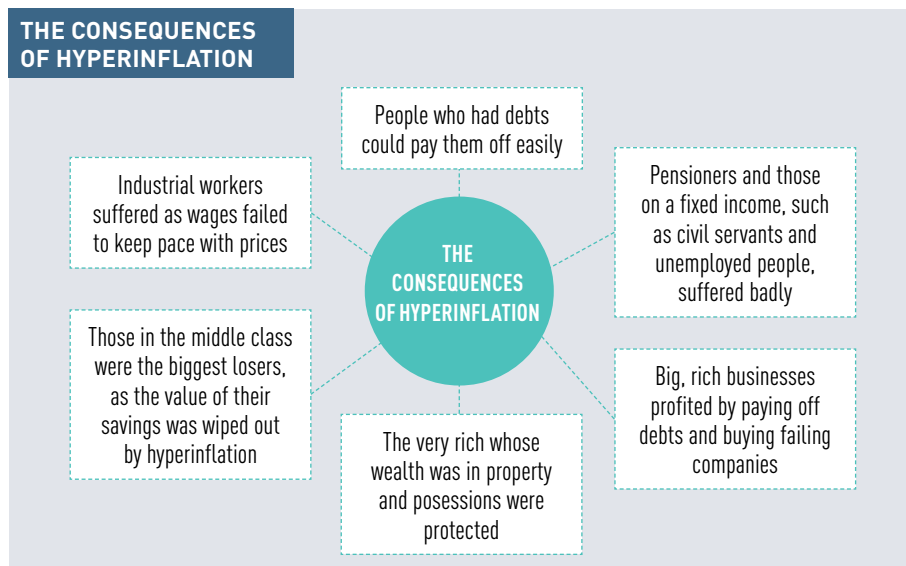
Piles of money in German bank.

**SOURCE 3.11**

German banknote for 10 billion marks.

**SOURCE 3.12**

A woman uses worthless Deutsche marks to light a fire.



### ➔ SOURCE 3.13

*The recollections of a woman who ran a Quaker [religious] relief centre which offered help to the poor. Cited in Greg Lacey and Keith Shephard, Germany 1918–1945: A Study in Depth (London: John Murray, 1997), 24–5.*

### ➔ SOURCE 3.14

*The recollections of a German writer. Cited in Greg Lacey and Keith Shephard, Germany 1918–1945: A Study in Depth (London: John Murray, 1997), 24–5.*

### ➔ SOURCE 3.15

*The recollections of a German writer. Cited in Greg Lacey and Keith Shephard, Germany 1918–1945: A Study in Depth (London: John Murray, 1997), 24–5.*

### ➔ SOURCE 3.16

*The recollections of a German university student. Cited in Greg Lacey and Keith Shephard, Germany 1918–1945: A Study in Depth (London: John Murray, 1997), 24–5.*

#### THE IMPACT OF HYPERINFLATION ON FAMILIES

[There was] the widow of a policeman who was left with four children. She had been awarded three months of her late husband's salary. The papers were sent on, as required, to Wiesbaden. There they were again checked, rubber-stamped and sent back to Frankfurt. By the time all this was done, and the money finally paid out to the widow, the amount would only have paid for three boxes of matches.

#### THE IMPACT OF HYPERINFLATION ON PRICES

One fine day I dropped into a café to have a coffee. As I went in I noticed the price was 5000 marks—just about what I had in my pocket. I sat down, read my paper, drank my coffee, and spent altogether about one hour in the café, and then asked for the bill. The waiter duly presented me with a bill for 8000 marks. 'Why 8000 marks?' I asked. The mark had dropped in the meantime, I was told. So I gave the waiter all the money I had, and he was generous enough to leave it at that.

#### A STRANGE CRIME

Two women were carrying a laundry basket filled to the brim with banknotes. Seeing a crowd standing round a shop window, they put down the basket for a moment to see if there was anything they could buy. When they turned round a few moments later, they found the money there untouched. But the basket was gone.

#### A STUDENT REMEMBERS

You very often bought things you did not need. But with those things in hand you could start to barter. You went round and exchanged a pair of socks for a sack of potatoes. And this process was repeated until you eventually ended up with the things you actually needed.

## ACTIVITY

### SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES

Read the sources and answer the following questions.

1. Analyse the impact that hyperinflation had on a range of different people. How were people's lives adversely affected by the declining value of the mark?
2. Explain why the people mentioned in these sources would have been particularly vulnerable to hyperinflation.
3. What methods or strategies did people use to cope with the effects of hyperinflation?
4. Why do you think that hyperinflation led to attacks on minority groups such as Jews?

### THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE

The government realised that it had to do something to end the hyperinflation spiral. A new chancellor, Gustav Stresemann, had been appointed in August 1923 and he was determined to take measures to stabilise the economy and end the occupation of the Ruhr. He called off the campaign of passive resistance and in September Germany resumed making reparations payments. The mark was abolished as a form of currency and replaced by the *Rentenmark* (later renamed the *Reichsmark*), which was much more stable. In order to save money, the government sacked 700 000 civil servants. Finally, Stresemann asked the Allies for an international conference to discuss Germany's dire economic situation and to reassess the reparations plan.

However, not all of the outcomes for the republic were positive. There was lasting resentment against the Weimar government, which was blamed for the crisis, particularly by members of the middle class who had lost all their savings. Workers who lost their jobs or were forced to sell their possessions for necessities such as food also carried deep grievances. This was reflected in the two Reichstag elections of 1924 (see Source 3.27). Amid the fury at the government's response, there were political uprisings from the fringes of the political spectrum. KPD uprisings in Saxony and Thuringia had to be put down by the army. In Bavaria, an extremist group calling itself the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) and its new leader, Adolf Hitler, came to national attention for the first time.

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Design a flowchart or mind map to explain the causes of inflation and hyperinflation in Germany from 1914 to 1923.
2. Explain why the German government called for a campaign of passive resistance against the French occupation of the Ruhr.
3. What were the outcomes of the passive resistance campaign?

### PRACTICE EXAM

1. Using three or four points, supported with evidence, explain the social impact that hyperinflation had on the German people.
2. Using three or four points, evaluate the outcomes of the Weimar government's responses to the hyperinflation crisis.

### ACTIVITIES

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Upon hearing Adolf Hitler speak for the first time at a DAP meeting in September 1919, Anton Drexler said to a colleague: 'Goodness, he's got a gob [mouth]! We could use him!'

#### SOURCE 3.17

Hitler speaking in 1923.

## HITLER FINDS HIS VOICE

**ADOLF HITLER:** 'I spoke for thirty minutes, and what before I had simply felt within me, without in any way knowing it, was now proved by reality: I could speak!'

### JOINING THE DAP

The end of World War I found Adolf Hitler recuperating in a military hospital. His unit, the List Regiment of the Bavarian Army, had been stationed near Ypres in Belgium when, on the night of 13–14 October 1918, the British bombed their position with mustard gas. Hitler was temporarily blinded by the attack, and he was transported to Stettin in Pomerania (in north-east Germany) for treatment. He was still there when, on 10 November, the hospital chaplain informed the patients that Germany had agreed to sign an armistice with the Allies. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler recorded his reaction:



### SOURCE 3.18

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*  
(London: Pimlico, 1992), 186–7.

#### HITLER ON THE NOVEMBER 1918 ARMISTICE, FROM *MEIN KAMPF*, 1926.

Was it for this that the German soldier had stood fast in the sun's heat and in snowstorms, hungry, thirsty, and freezing, weary from sleepless nights and endless marches? Was it for this that he had lain in the hell of the drumfire and in the fever of gas attacks without wavering, always thoughtful of his one duty to preserve the fatherland from the enemy peril? ... The more I tried to achieve clarity on the monstrous event in this hour, the more the shame of indignation and disgrace burned my brow. What was all the pain in me compared to this misery? There followed terrible days and even worse nights—I knew that all was lost. Only fools, liars, and criminals could hope in the mercy of the enemy. In these nights hatred grew in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Where was Hitler when he heard that Germany had signed the armistice?
2. Explain Hitler's reaction to the news of the armistice. Support your explanation with reference to Hitler's words and the tone of his response.
3. Who might be 'those responsible for this deed'?
4. By referring to the extract, and using your own knowledge, explain why Germany agreed to sign the armistice with the Allies.
5. Evaluate to what extent this extract is useful in explaining how news of the armistice was received by the German population.



### SOURCE 3.19

Adolf Hitler (seated on the right) with members of his unit in World War I, including Foxl, the white terrier.



ANTON DREXLER

After being released from hospital, Hitler made his way to Munich, the city he had been living in when the war broke out. He had no prospects and his bank account contained only fifteen marks.<sup>14</sup> The army was his salvation. Unlike almost all of his comrades, who were discharged as soon as the war ended, Hitler was permitted to stay on until 31 March 1920. In the wake of the socialist uprising in Munich in early 1919, the army units in Bavaria received special political education designed to 'root out any lingering socialist sentiments ... and indoctrinate them with the beliefs of the far right.'<sup>15</sup> Hitler took to these ideas so quickly that by August 1919 he was asked to give lectures to other soldiers. One of the main topics of his speeches was anti-Semitism. The purpose of laws in Germany, Hitler declared to his fellow-soldiers, 'must unshakably be the removal of the Jews altogether.'<sup>16</sup>

Given his talent as a speaker and his instinctive grasp of politics, Hitler was asked by his captain to attend meetings of the many political parties that had sprung up in Munich after the war and report on their ideologies and activities. One such party was the *Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (German Workers' Party or DAP). Started by Anton Drexler on 5 January 1919, the DAP blended socialism and nationalism. It had only a few dozen members when Hitler went along to one of its meetings in a Munich beer hall on 12 September 1919. Hitler was unimpressed by the speakers at the tiny meeting until one of them talked in favour of Bavarian separatism. Hitler attacked him so passionately that Drexler handed him a pamphlet, *My Political Awakening*, and asked Hitler to join the fledgling party. Hitler pondered the invitation for a few days until, sometime in mid-September, he decided to join the DAP.

## ADOLF HITLER: LIFE BEFORE WORLD WAR I

As historian Ian Kershaw notes, the events of Hitler's early years 'bear no hint of what would emerge.'<sup>17</sup> He was born on 20 April 1889 in the small village of Braunau Am Inn, on the border of Bavaria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His father, Alois, was a mid-ranked customs official. His mother, Klara, was a housewife. In 1899 Alois purchased a small farm outside the town of Linz and moved his family there, including Hitler's younger sister Paula. The Hitlers had moved house several times and the elementary school Hitler attended in Linz was his third. Initially a good student, by secondary school the young Hitler grew to despise his teachers; in turn, his teachers thought he was lazy and rude.<sup>18</sup>

Hitler's father died in 1903. Alois had wanted his son to follow him into the civil service, but Hitler dreamed of becoming an artist. He left school in 1905, aged sixteen, without graduating and two years later applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. Hitler recalled being totally unprepared for the news: 'When I received my rejection, it struck me as a bolt from the blue.'<sup>19</sup> By this time Hitler's mother was gravely ill with breast cancer; she died in December 1907. Hitler, who went back to Linz for the funeral, was grief-stricken: 'It was a dreadful blow, particularly for me ... My mother I had loved.'<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, Hitler returned to Vienna determined to make something of himself. Living off an orphan's pension, Hitler spent his days wandering the streets and admiring the architecture.

He read in the state library and went to the opera, where Wagner was his favourite composer. In September 1908 he applied again to the Academy, and was again rejected. Down and out, Hitler found lodgings at hostels for penniless men. He managed to make a little bit of money by selling watercolour paintings of Viennese street scenes.

At that time Vienna was a cosmopolitan city that was home to dozens of different nationalities. There were also 175 000 Jewish people in the city, about 9 per cent of the population.<sup>21</sup> It was during his years in Vienna that Hitler formed his ideas on the purity of the German race and his rabid anti-semitism. 'The longer I lived in this city,' he wrote, 'the more my hatred grew for the foreign mixture of peoples which had begun to corrode this old site of German culture.'<sup>22</sup> Hitler left Vienna for Munich in 1913. When war broke out in August 1914 Hitler volunteered and in October, as part of the 16th Bavarian Reserve Regiment, he was sent to fight on the Western Front.<sup>23</sup>

### DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler's father, Alois, was an illegitimate child and took his mother's surname 'Schicklgruber.' Alois was only permitted to change his surname to 'Hitler,' his biological father's surname, in 1876. Somehow 'Heil Schicklgruber!' doesn't have quite the same ring to it as 'Heil Hitler!'



THE RISE OF  
HITLER

### ▼ SOURCE 3.20

Hitler's primary school class. Hitler is in the middle of the top row.



## IDEOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP

Soon after joining the party, Hitler became a member of the DAP's leadership committee. He quickly became one of the dominant personalities in the Party and, in February 1920, helped Drexler write up the Party's 25-Point Program (see Source 3.23). In April, the Party changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). This was usually abbreviated to 'Nazi' (short for 'National Socialists'). In mid-1920, Hitler personally designed a new banner for the NSDAP, consisting of a black swastika inside a white circle on a red background. Hitler commented on the significance of the colours and symbols in *Mein Kampf*:

### ➔ SOURCE 3.21

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*  
(London: Pimlico, 1992), 451–2.



HISTORY OF  
THE SWASTIKA  
DOCUMENTARY

#### HITLER ON THE NAZI BANNER

I myself ... after innumerable attempts, had laid a final form; a flag with a red background, a white disk, and a black swastika in the middle. After long trials I also found a definite proportion between the size of the flag and the size of the white disk, as well as the shape and thickness of the swastika ... What a symbol it really is! In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the nationalist idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man!

### ➔ SOURCE 3.22

Flags bearing the swastika  
at a Nazi rally in 1933.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler thought that the swastika represented the pure Germanic race, or Aryans. But the swastika is actually an ancient symbol used in the Buddhist and Hindu faiths, where it represents luck and prosperity. Because of its associations with Nazism and the Holocaust, the swastika is deeply stigmatised in Western cultures; it is illegal to publicly display the swastika in Germany and Austria.



Hitler was put in charge of the propaganda section of the NSDAP and quickly began to attract larger crowds to their meetings. On 24 February 1920 nearly 2000 people listened as Hitler unveiled the Party's 25-Point Program.<sup>24</sup> He was also quite successful in securing funds for the Party by encouraging donations. Hitler's own gifts as a public speaker helped fill the beer-halls of Munich where the Party held their meetings. As Ian Kershaw notes, 'It was largely owing to Hitler's public profile that the party membership increased sharply from 190 in January 1920 to 2000 by the end of the year and 3300 by August 1921.'<sup>25</sup>

## THE 25-POINT PROGRAM

### SOURCE 3.23

"The 25 Points 1920: Early Nazi Program,"  
Fordham University, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/25points.asp>

#### KEY EXTRACTS FROM THE 25-POINT PROGRAM

- 1 We demand the union of all Germans in a Greater Germany on the basis of the right of national self-determination.
- 2 We demand equality of rights for the German people in its dealings with other nations, and the revocation [repeal] of the peace treaties of Versailles and Saint Germain.
- 3 We demand land and territory (colonies) to feed our people and to settle our surplus population [*lebensraum*].
- 4 Only members of the *volk* [Germanic people] may be citizens of the State. Only those of German blood, whatever their creed may be members of the nation. Accordingly no Jew may be a member of the nation ...
- 7 We demand that the State shall make it its primary duty to provide a livelihood for its citizens. If it should prove impossible to feed the entire population, non-citizens must be deported from the Reich ...
- 10 It must be the first duty of every citizen to perform physical or mental work. The activities of the individual must not clash with the general interest, but must proceed within the framework of the community and be for the general good ...
- 14 We demand profit sharing in large industrial enterprises.
- 15 We demand the extensive development of insurance for old age.
- 16 We demand the creation of a healthy middle class and its conservation, immediate socialisation of the great warehouses and their being leased at low cost to small firms.
- 17 We demand a land reform suitable to our needs, provision of a law for the free expropriation [use] of land for the purposes of public utility, abolition of taxes on land and prevention of all speculation in land.
- 18 We demand the ruthless prosecution of those whose activities are injurious to the common interest. Common criminals, usurers, profiteers must be punished with death ...
- 25 We demand the creation of a strong central power of the Reich.

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Summarise in a few words each of the points presented.
2. Conduct a quick web search on the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and list its key points.
3. Draw up and complete a table similar to the one below. For each of the points presented in Source 3.23, place a tick in the appropriate box to indicate whether you think it is nationalist (in support of one's country), socialist (sharing the wealth equally) or racist (judgments made about a person's racial or religious background).

| Point  | Nationalist | Socialist | Racist |
|--------|-------------|-----------|--------|
| 1      |             |           |        |
| 2      |             |           |        |
| 3      |             |           |        |
| 4, etc |             |           |        |

4. Discuss with a partner the decision you made for each point. Then share your ideas with the rest of the class.



## THE RISE OF THE NAZI PARTY

### DID YOU KNOW?

Ernst Röhm was badly wounded in the face during World War I. He bore the scars for the rest of his life.



Ernst Röhm.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In the wake of the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923, Drexler left the Nazi Party. He lived in obscurity until he was asked to rejoin the party in 1933. This was purely a propaganda stunt engineered to suggest that Hitler had 'made up' with his old comrade. Drexler played no role in the Nazi Party or Germany's war effort, and he died in Munich in 1942.

### ➔ SOURCE 3.24

Marienplatz in Munich during the Beer Hall Putsch, November 1923.

This success, however, sowed the seeds of resentment in the Nazi Party's founders. Drexler and other members of the leadership committee attempted to curtail Hitler's growing dominance by merging the NSDAP with other Bavarian nationalist parties. When Hitler heard of this, he threatened to resign. He knew that he had the support of the vast majority of ordinary members and, at two meetings in July 1921, Hitler's resignation offer was rejected. He was appointed party president while Drexler was given the meaningless position of honorary president. Hitler was now master of the Nazi Party.

## THE BEER HALL PUTSCH

**ADOLF HITLER:** 'The man who is born to be a dictator is not compelled. He wills it.'

Hitler started making rapid and significant changes to the Nazi Party. Soon after taking power he formed the SA (*Sturmabteilung* or Assault Battalion). This was a paramilitary organisation led by Ernst Röhm, a captain in the German Army during World War I. They were nicknamed the 'brown shirts' after their distinctive uniform. Their primary function was to protect Nazi Party meetings and break up the meetings of political opponents. SA activities frequently led to massive street brawls.<sup>26</sup> Hitler also recruited Hermann Göring, a World War I fighter pilot with connections to German aristocracy. Hitler had also developed contacts with Erich Ludendorff. Göring and Ludendorff gave some much-needed respectability to the Nazi Party, which was often seen merely as a fringe-dwelling, rabble-rousing mob.

Towards the end of 1923, Nazi Party membership had risen to 55 000.<sup>27</sup> Members came from all classes and were attracted by Hitler's speaking style and his relentless attacks on the Weimar government. The Party, however, remained very much a Bavarian movement and had almost no impact at the national level. Hitler was inspired by Mussolini's 'March on Rome' in 1922 and sought



## MUSSOLINI'S MARCH ON ROME, 1922

### The First Fascist

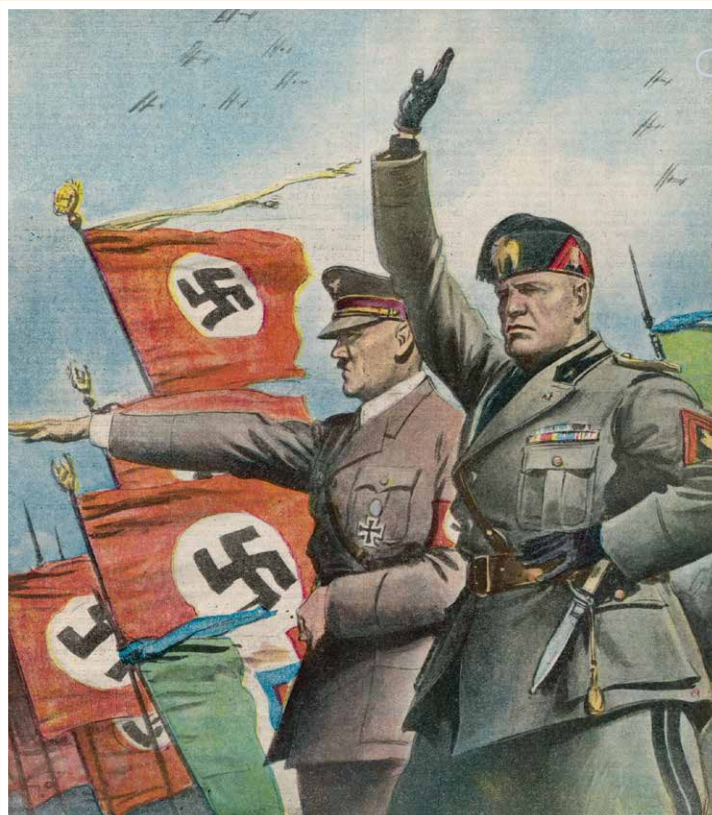
Benito Mussolini founded the Italian Fascist Party in March 1919. Like Nazism, fascism appealed to ardent nationalists and was violently anti-communist. In October 1922, Mussolini and his supporters, named the Blackshirts, marched on Rome to demand government authority. This was granted by King Victor Emmanuel III and Mussolini was appointed prime minister on 30 October. Mussolini seized dictatorial powers in 1925. Hitler was greatly impressed by the March on Rome and its success inspired him to undertake his own coup.



WHAT IS FASCISM?  
SOURCE ANALYSIS

### ➔ SOURCE 3.25

Mussolini and Hitler, depicted in 1937.



## ACTIVITY

### EXTENSION

Compare and contrast the lives of Hitler and Mussolini from their births to 1925. Include topics such as childhood, education, service during World War I, ideology and political activities. You could present this as a report or a detailed table.

### DID YOU KNOW?

As a World War I fighter pilot, Hermann Göring commanded *Jagdgeschwader 1* (Fighter Wing 1), the unit Manfred von Richthofen, better known as the Red Baron, led before his death on 21 April 1918. Göring scored twenty-two 'kills' during the war, thereby qualifying as an 'ace.'

to replicate the Italian dictator's success with his own 'March on Berlin.' The trigger was the Weimar government's decision in September 1923 to call off the campaign of passive resistance and resume paying war reparations.<sup>28</sup>

On the night of 8 November, the Bavarian prime minister, Gustav von Kahr, and the chiefs of the Bavarian army (Otto von Lossow) and police (Hans von Seisser) were addressing a crowd of 3000 businessmen in a Munich beerhall named the *Bürgerbräukeller*. Hitler and Göring, along with 600 SA troops, stormed the meeting and announced that a national revolution had begun. Hitler coerced von Kahr, von Seisser and von Lossow to join his uprising. The next day, Hitler and about 3000 Nazi supporters, including Göring and Ludendorff, marched on the Munich Town Hall where they hoped to gain the support of the army and police. This became known as the Munich Beer Hall Putsch. The goal after that was to somehow move on Berlin.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler claimed he was the seventh member of the DAP. This is not true. He was the seventh member of the leadership committee, but his membership card number was 555. Even this is misleading. In order to give the impression that the DAP was more popular than it really was, the party started its membership at the number 501. Hitler, therefore, was the fifty-fourth member of the DAP.

## THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PUTSCH

The putsch had little chance of success. It was poorly organised and did not have a realistic objective. The police, who had not gone over to the Nazis, lined the town square. As the Nazis entered, the police ordered them to halt and then opened fire. Some of the Nazis who were carrying guns returned fire. Fourteen Nazis and four policemen were killed. Hitler fell to the ground and dislocated his shoulder. He was taken away in a car and arrested two days later. Many of the leading Nazis, along with Ludendorff, were arrested in the square.<sup>29</sup>

In February 1924 the trial of the leading Nazis began. Hitler used the occasion as a platform to expound the Nazi ideology. 'There is no such thing as high treason against the traitors of 1918,' Hitler told the court during one of his lengthy monologues.<sup>30</sup> The judge, sympathetic to the Nazi cause, handed down lenient sentences. Hitler received a prison sentence of four years but ended up serving only nine months. Hitler served this time in relative comfort in Landsberg prison, where he started dictating the first few chapters of what would become *Mein Kampf* to his faithful subordinate, Rudolf Hess. The most important outcome of the failed putsch was Hitler's realisation that he could not overthrow the state in a violent revolution. If he wanted to rule Germany, he would have to work with the system rather than against it. In other words, he would have to become a legitimate politician.

### ➔ SOURCE 3.26

Hitler and his supporters during their trial for treason. Ludendorff is to the left of Hitler and Röhm is second from the right.



## ACTIVITIES

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Identify two of the individuals present in this photo.
2. Identify two elements of the image that suggest some military support for the Nazi Party.
3. By referring directly to the image, and using your own knowledge, explain what prompted Hitler to launch the Beer Hall Putsch in November 1923.
4. Evaluate to what extent this image helps us understand the nature and extent of the support for the Nazi Party by February 1924.

### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How and when did Hitler first come into contact with the DAP?
2. What effect did Hitler have on the Nazi Party membership? Refer to relevant statistics in your response.
3. What role did the SA play in the early years of the Nazi Party?

## THE NAZI WORLD VIEW

Nazism wasn't really a political ideology. An ideology is a group of closely connected ideas that form an interpretative framework for analysing society and human activity. Marxism and liberalism are two classic examples of ideologies. Nazism, on the other hand, was a random collection of ideas cobbled together by Hitler during his years in Vienna. There was nothing particularly original or unique about them; most of his ideas were popular among some German-speaking people throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> The basic tenets of Nazism can be found in *Mein Kampf* and Hitler remained committed to them until his death in 1945.



NAZI IDEOLOGY:  
USING EVIDENCE

### RACISM

Hitler believed that the races of the world could be organised into a hierarchy with the Aryans at the top as the master race (or *Herrenvolk*). They should resist diminishing the purity of their blood by mingling with lesser races. In a perversion of Darwin's theories on evolution and the survival of the fittest, Hitler believed that there would be a struggle between the various races for world domination.

### ANTI-SEMITISM

Closely linked to Hitler's racism was his hatred of Jewish people. Hitler believed that they were the lowest form of humanity, and that they were seeking to corrupt and subjugate all races, particularly the Aryans. For Hitler, Jews represented an impure race that had to be destroyed in order to protect the pure Aryan people and their culture. This would eventually lead to the Holocaust during World War II.

### NATIONALISM

Hitler believed that all true Germans should commit themselves to the Fatherland, sacrificing their life if necessary. He also demanded the right of the German people to *Lebensraum* ('living space'), particularly in Eastern Europe and Russia. This, of course, would mean the total rejection of the Treaty of Versailles and the creation of a vast Germanic state in Europe.

## THE IDEOLOGY OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM

### FÜHRERPRINZIP

This was the idea (or principle) that the leader, or *führer*, was infallible and could not be questioned. Hitler ensured his dominance of the Nazi Party by adopting a structure (see page 110) that placed him at the apex. All key decisions were either made personally or approved by Hitler. Once a decision had been made, no debate would be tolerated. This was essentially anti-democratic and hence a direct threat to the Weimar Republic.

### ANTI-MARXIST

Despite having 'socialism' in the Party name, Hitler was deeply opposed to the socialist ideas of Karl Marx as implemented during the Russian Revolution. Hitler felt that Marx's ideas were essentially un-German and linked to the Jewish plot to take over the world. Hitler therefore despised the Soviet Union and the left-wing parties in the German political system. The *Lebensraum* he demanded would come chiefly from Russia, and its people would toil as slaves for German settlers.

### VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT

This term roughly means 'the pure, Germanic nation.' Hitler thought that all members of the racially pure *volk* (people) should come together in a single community. They would put the collective good above the needs and desires of the individual. 'German values' would be promoted over divisive notions of class, politics and religion. This was a vague concept that appealed to many Germans, from all social positions.

# WEIMAR: THE YEARS OF STABILITY 1924–29

**GUSTAV STRESEMANN:** 'German policy will be one of finesse.'

The twin crises of the French occupation and hyperinflation had an adverse impact on the moderate and liberal parties of the Reichstag. In the two elections of 1924, middle-class voters, who had suffered greatly when their savings were wiped out, abandoned the centre-right DDP and DVP for the nationalist DNVP. (see Source 3.27) Voters on the left switched from the SPD to the more radical KPD. The anti-republican, anti-democratic parties were on the rise. Even the NSDAP, previously a nonentity in federal German politics, picked up a handful of seats in the Reichstag. In spite of this, the years 1924–29 are typically seen as an era of relative stability for the Weimar Republic.<sup>32</sup>

## ➔ SOURCE 3.27

Martin Collier and Philip  
Pedley, *Germany 1919–45*  
(Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), 31.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In 1926, Stresemann shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Aristide Briand, the French foreign minister, for their work on the Locarno Treaty.



Gustav Stresemann.

## REICHSTAG ELECTION RESULTS DURING THE 1920s

| PARTY   | MAY 1924 (472 SEATS) |                 | DECEMBER 1924 (493 SEATS) |                 | MAY 1928 (491 SEATS) |                 |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
|         | PERCENTAGE OF VOTES  | NUMBER OF SEATS | PERCENTAGE OF VOTES       | NUMBER OF SEATS | PERCENTAGE OF VOTES  | NUMBER OF SEATS |
| KPD     | 12.6%                | 62              | 9.0%                      | 45              | 10.6%                | 54              |
| SPD     | 20.5%                | 100             | 26.0%                     | 131             | 29.8%                | 153             |
| DDP     | 5.7%                 | 28              | 6.3%                      | 32              | 4.9%                 | 25              |
| Zentrum | 13.4%                | 65              | 13.6%                     | 69              | 12.1%                | 62              |
| BVP     | 3.2%                 | 16              | 3.7%                      | 19              | 3.1%                 | 16              |
| DVP     | 9.2%                 | 45              | 10.1%                     | 51              | 8.7%                 | 45              |
| DNVP    | 19.5%                | 95              | 20.5%                     | 103             | 14.2%                | 73              |
| NSDAP   | 6.5%                 | 32              | 3.0%                      | 14              | 2.6%                 | 12              |

## ACTIVITY

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Which party received the most votes between 1924 and 1928?
2. Which party received the least votes between 1924 and 1928?
3. Explain the rise and decline of support for the NSDAP over this time.

## ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY GAINS

The most prominent Weimar politician during this period was Gustav Stresemann. Stresemann was chancellor for only three months in 1923 (August–September) but he played a crucial role in bringing the French occupation of the Ruhr to an end. He was Germany's foreign minister (1924–29) and did a great deal to bring Germany back into the international community. As a founding member of the DVP, Stresemann was quite successful at holding together a coalition of moderate left- and right-wing parties. His first success was the Dawes Plan of 1924. Named after the American banker Charles Dawes, a committee

of international economists tried to find a solution to Germany's reparations problems. The committee devised the following solution:

- The French army is to leave the Ruhr
- Establish a new national bank and currency, the *Rentenmark*
- A loan of 800 million marks from the United States to aid German economic recovery
- Reparations payments to be made over a longer period of time in amounts that would not ruin the German economy.

The plan was a success but relied heavily on a steady flow of money from the United States. In 1925, Stresemann proposed a security pact with France. Under the terms, known as the Locarno Treaty, Germany and France agreed that the border between their two countries would remain permanent and the Rhineland would remain free of German troops. Violence was also renounced as a means of settling international disputes. Subsequently, Germany was admitted into the League of Nations on 8 September 1926.

Stresemann's last diplomatic success was the Young Plan. Under the terms of this agreement, named after Owen D. Young, the American banker who chaired the negotiation panel, reparations were to be paid until 1988. The limit was set at 2000 million marks, 500 million less than the sum set under the Dawes Plan. In addition, Allied troops would be withdrawn from the Rhineland in 1930, five years ahead of schedule.<sup>33</sup> For Stresemann personally, and Germany generally, these deals represented significant successes. This was reflected in the election results of May 1928 which saw the pro-republic parties regain the votes they had lost in 1924 (see Source 3.27).

Another important development in this period was the election of former World War I Field Marshall Paul von Hindenburg as president of the Republic in 1925. Hindenburg did not stand in the first round, but he was persuaded to run by other high-ranking officers and conservative politicians who were concerned about a victory by the centre-left candidates. DVP candidate Karl Jarres withdrew his candidacy in favour of Hindenburg, who narrowly won the second round. Hindenburg did not represent any particular party and he swore to faithfully uphold the Constitution. Nevertheless, Hindenburg was deeply conservative and his election was a victory for the nationalist, anti-democratic elements of German politics.<sup>34</sup>



Paul von Hindenburg, president of Germany 1925–1934.

#### RESULTS OF THE 1925 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

| FIRST ROUND             |            |      | SECOND ROUND                    |            |      |
|-------------------------|------------|------|---------------------------------|------------|------|
| CANDIDATE/PARTY         | VOTES      | %    | CANDIDATE/PARTY                 | VOTES      | %    |
| Karl Jarres (DVP; DNVP) | 10 416 658 | 38.8 | Paul von Hindenburg (unaligned) | 14 655 641 | 48.3 |
| Otto Braun (SPD)        | 7 802 497  | 29.0 | Wilhelm Marx (Zentrum)          | 13 751 605 | 45.3 |
| Wilhelm Marx (Zentrum)  | 3 887 734  | 14.5 | Ernst Thälmann (KPD)            | 1 931 151  | 6.4  |
| Ernst Thälmann (KPD)    | 1 871 815  | 7.0  |                                 |            |      |

#### ← SOURCE 3.28

"Weimar Germany Presidential Election 1925," *Electoral Geography 2.0*, <http://www.electoralgeography.com/new/en/countries/g/germany/germany-presidential-election-1925.html>

DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler originally wanted the title of his book to be *Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice*. His publisher, Max Amman, shrewdly suggested that he reduce it to the more marketable *My Struggle* (*Mein Kampf*).

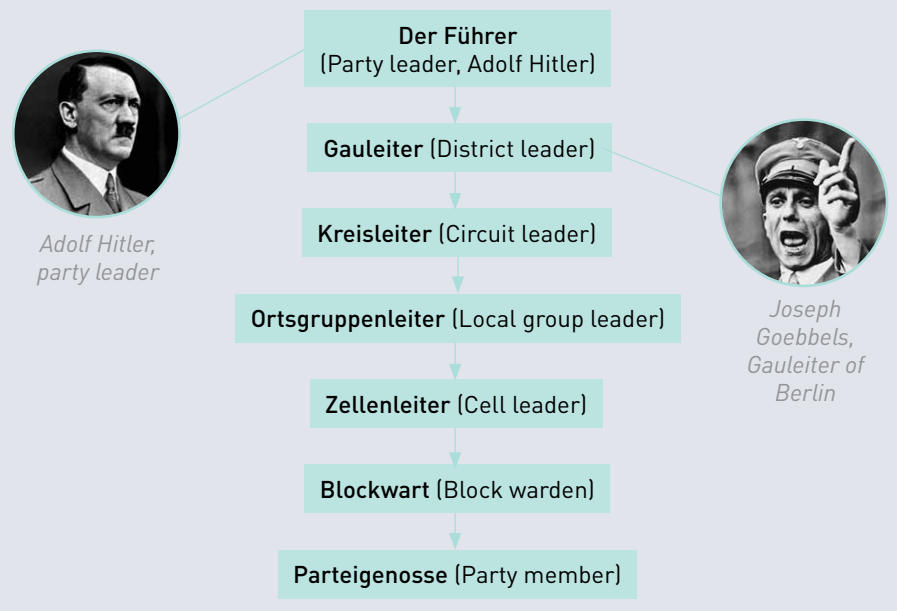
## NAZIS ON THE MARGIN: 1924–30

WILLIAM L. SHIRER: 'One scarcely heard of Hitler or the Nazis except as butts of jokes.'

When Hitler was released from prison in December 1924, his political future looked grim indeed. Other party leaders were in jail or exile and membership was falling. The brief success the party experienced in the May 1924 Reichstag elections had evaporated by December (see Source 3.27). The party leadership group was also bitterly divided in terms of philosophy: some members believed ardently in the socialist aspects of the party while others promoted nationalism and anti-Marxism. On 25 February 1925 Hitler officially re-launched the Nazi Party. However, he was unable to control the rival factions. Some party members utterly rejected Hitler's new policy of a legitimate path to power rather than a violent revolution.<sup>35</sup>

In spite of this, Hitler was determined to stamp his complete authority over the party. At a party conference in the northern Bavarian town of Bamberg on 14 February 1926, Hitler introduced the concept of *Führerprinzip* (the leadership principle). *Führerprinzip* held that the leader was infallible and could not be questioned.<sup>36</sup> Absolute loyalty was the highest virtue in the re-born party. Crucially, Hitler also won over Joseph Goebbels, one of the key Nazi Party members in Berlin. As a reward for his support, Goebbels was appointed *Gauleiter* of Germany's capital in October 1926. Hitler also set about restructuring the party. Germany was divided into regions (*Gaue*) which matched the electoral districts of the Weimar Republic. Each *Gau* was controlled by a *Gauleiter* who then created district (*Kreis*) and branch (*Ort*) groups in his region. This continued down to the ordinary party members (*parteigenosse*). The leader of each subdivision was directly responsible to the person above them, and the leaders of the *Gaue* were personally responsible to Hitler. This vertical and hierarchical structure gave Hitler almost total control over the NSDAP.

### STRUCTURE OF THE NSDAP





#### 📌 SOURCE 3.29

Hitler salutes SA troops during a Nazi Party rally.

Important symbolic changes were also made to raise the Party's profile and transmit a sense of unity and purpose. In 1924, the brown shirts of the SA troops became the official party uniform. Two years later the right-arm salute and the cry 'Heil Hitler!', used only intermittently since 1923, became an official, even ritualistic, element of party meetings and rallies.<sup>37</sup>

## THE FORMATION OF THE SS

A new group within the Nazi Party was created in 1925: the *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squad), better known as the SS. This was an elite body whose hand-picked members swore a personal oath to protect Hitler with their lives.<sup>38</sup> The SS were distinguished from the SA by their black uniforms. Initially, the SS comprised 200 members. From 1929 the SS was put under the command of Heinrich Himmler and the organisation started to grow rapidly in terms of manpower and influence within the party.

## PARTY MEMBERSHIP

The Nazi Party slowly recovered from the failed putsch of 1923 and its membership began to rise (see Source 3.31). In spite of the significant changes to the party's structure, image and overall strategy, Hitler was deeply disappointed with the results of the 1928 election. The Nazis had failed to capitalise on the

### DID YOU KNOW?

The brown shirts used by the Nazis as their uniform from 1924 were actually army surplus. They were originally made for German soldiers fighting in East Africa during World War I.

**➔ SOURCE 3.30**

Hitler's bodyguard, the SS.



**DID YOU KNOW?**

All members of the Nazi Party were given a badge, but only the first 100 000 had a badge where the rim was embossed with a golden laurel wreath. The wearers of this badge called themselves *Alte Kämpfer* (Old Fighters), as they had joined up during the party's early days.



NSDAP golden party badge.

**ACTIVITY**

**SOURCE ANALYSIS**

1. What role did the SS play in the early years of the Nazi Party?
2. What impact would the uniform and formations of the SS have on an observer at a Nazi Party rally?

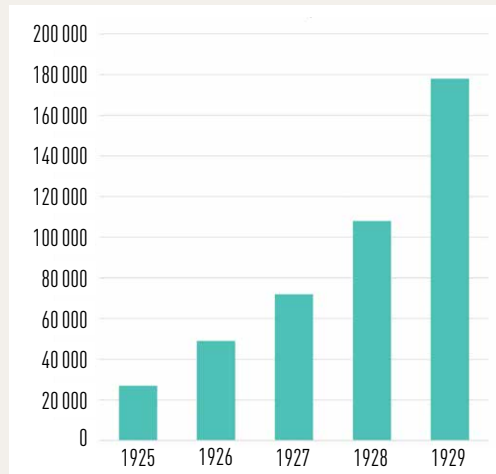
December 1924 election result and lost two of its seats in the Reichstag (see Source 3.27). The relative prosperity and stability of the Weimar Republic from the mid-1920s starved the party of the crises on which it thrived. A German government report in 1927 noted that the NSDAP 'was not advancing' and was 'a numerically insignificant ... radical revolutionary splinter group.'<sup>39</sup> If the party was to survive and become a real force in German politics, Hitler needed another crisis.

**➔ SOURCE 3.31**

*Alan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (London: Penguin Books, 1952), 141.*

**NAZI PARTY MEMBERSHIP**

| YEAR | MEMBERSHIP |
|------|------------|
| 1925 | 27 000     |
| 1926 | 49 000     |
| 1927 | 72 000     |
| 1928 | 108 000    |
| 1929 | 178 000    |



## HITLER BECOMES CHANCELLOR

PRESIDENT VON HINDENBURG, JANUARY 1933: 'You cannot for one moment, gentlemen, imagine that I intend to appoint that Austrian corporal Reich Chancellor.'

### ECONOMIC COLLAPSE

On Tuesday 29 October 1929, the Wall Street stock market in New York crashed. The effects were felt in most developed countries in the world, but Germany was particularly vulnerable. American banks had invested heavily in the stock market and lost billions. To make good their losses, they recalled a large proportion of their loans including those given to Germany. The German government and businesses had borrowed heavily from American banks and relied on a constant stream of credit from them to keep operating. Now this crucial source of funds had dried up. German exports also dropped because the purchasing power of most nations had declined. As a result, German businesses began laying off their workers. By 1931, 50 000 businesses had been forced to close and 5.5 million Germans were out of work.<sup>40</sup> The resulting social and economic chaos gave Hitler the opportunity he desperately needed to turn around the fortunes of the NSDAP. As unemployment started to rise, the Party made enormous gains in the Reichstag and presidential elections of the early 1930s.

### WHO VOTED FOR THE NAZIS?

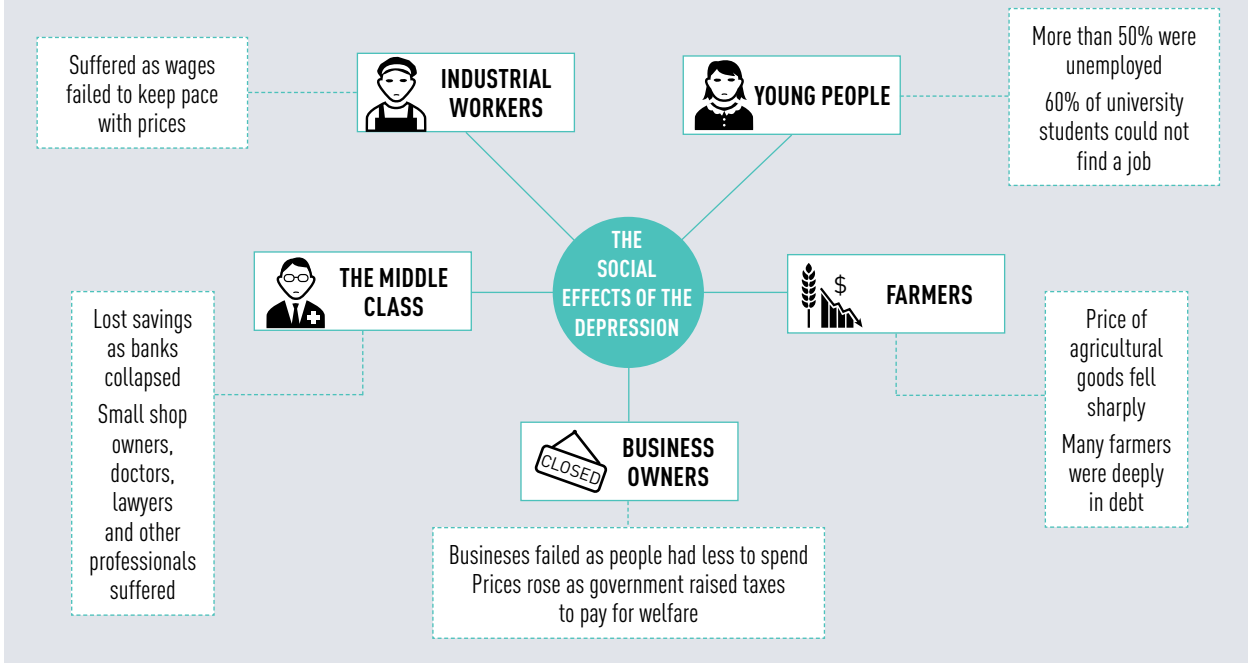
When the Great Depression hit Germany and millions were thrown out of work, people started to look for answers. Hitler and the Nazis appealed to them by pointing at scapegoats such as the Weimar politicians, Jewish people and the communists (who had also done well in the *Reichstag* elections of 1930 and 1932). Hitler's persistent attacks on the Treaty of Versailles were also very popular with patriotic Germans of all classes. While the Nazis won the vote of a broad cross-section of German society, they were particularly popular with the middle class. Interestingly, about one-third of German workers also voted for Hitler rather than the KPD or SPD.<sup>41</sup> Geographically, the Nazis were more popular in the north and east of the country. They competed with the KPD and SPD in industrial areas, like the Ruhr, for the working-class vote. The Nazis gained many votes in rural areas but did poorly in regions that were strongly Catholic, such as Bavaria (where, ironically, the Nazi Party was founded).

#### ➔ SOURCE 3.32

Nazi campaign poster from 1932. It reads 'Work, Freedom and Bread. Vote for the National Socialists.'



## THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF THE DEPRESSION IN GERMANY



### ➔ SOURCE 3.33

"Election Results in Germany 1924–1933," Marxists Internet Archive, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/elect.htm>

### RESULTS OF THE 1932 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

| FIRST ROUND (MARCH)               |            |      | SECOND ROUND (APRIL)              |            |      |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------|-----------------------------------|------------|------|
| CANDIDATE/PARTY                   | VOTES      | %    | CANDIDATE/PARTY                   | VOTES      | %    |
| Paul von Hindenburg (independent) | 18 651 497 | 49.6 | Paul von Hindenburg (independent) | 19 359 983 | 53.0 |
| Adolf Hitler (NSDAP)              | 11 339 446 | 30.1 | Adolf Hitler (NSDAP)              | 13 418 547 | 36.8 |
| Ernst Thälmann (KPD)              | 4 938 341  | 13.2 | Ernst Thälmann (KPD)              | 3 706 759  | 10.2 |
| Theodor Duesterberg (DNVP)        | 2 557 729  | 6.8  |                                   |            |      |

### ➔ SOURCE 3.34

Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), 77.

### REICHSTAG ELECTION RESULTS 1930 AND 1932

| PARTY   | SEPTEMBER 1930 (577 SEATS) |                 | JULY 1932 (608 SEATS) |                 |
|---------|----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|
|         | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE         | NUMBER OF SEATS | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE    | NUMBER OF SEATS |
| KPD     | 13.1%                      | 77              | 14.3%                 | 89              |
| SPD     | 24.5%                      | 143             | 21.6%                 | 133             |
| DDP     | 3.8%                       | 20              | 1.0%                  | 4               |
| Zentrum | 11.8%                      | 68              | 12.5%                 | 75              |
| BVP     | 3.0%                       | 19              | 3.2%                  | 22              |
| DVP     | 4.5%                       | 30              | 1.2%                  | 7               |
| DNVP    | 7.0%                       | 41              | 5.9%                  | 37              |
| NSDAP   | 18.3%                      | 107             | 37.3%                 | 230             |

## SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Identify the two parties that gained the most seats in the Reichstag from 1930 to 1932.
2. Identify the two parties that lost the most seats in the Reichstag from 1930 to 1932.
3. By referring to the statistics in the tables, and using your own knowledge, explain the economic, social and political effects of the Depression on Germany.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of these sources in explaining the popularity of the Nazi Party from 1924 to 1932.

## SKILLS: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Explain the similarities and differences between the hyperinflation of 1923 and the Great Depression of 1929. Explore themes such as the origins of the economic crises, the impact on people's lives and the overall outcomes.

## NAZI ELECTION STRATEGIES

The Great Depression was not the only reason for the NSDAP's success at the ballot box from 1930. The Party employed a range of modern techniques designed to secure as many votes as possible. Hitler's public speaking was also a strong drawcard for the Party.

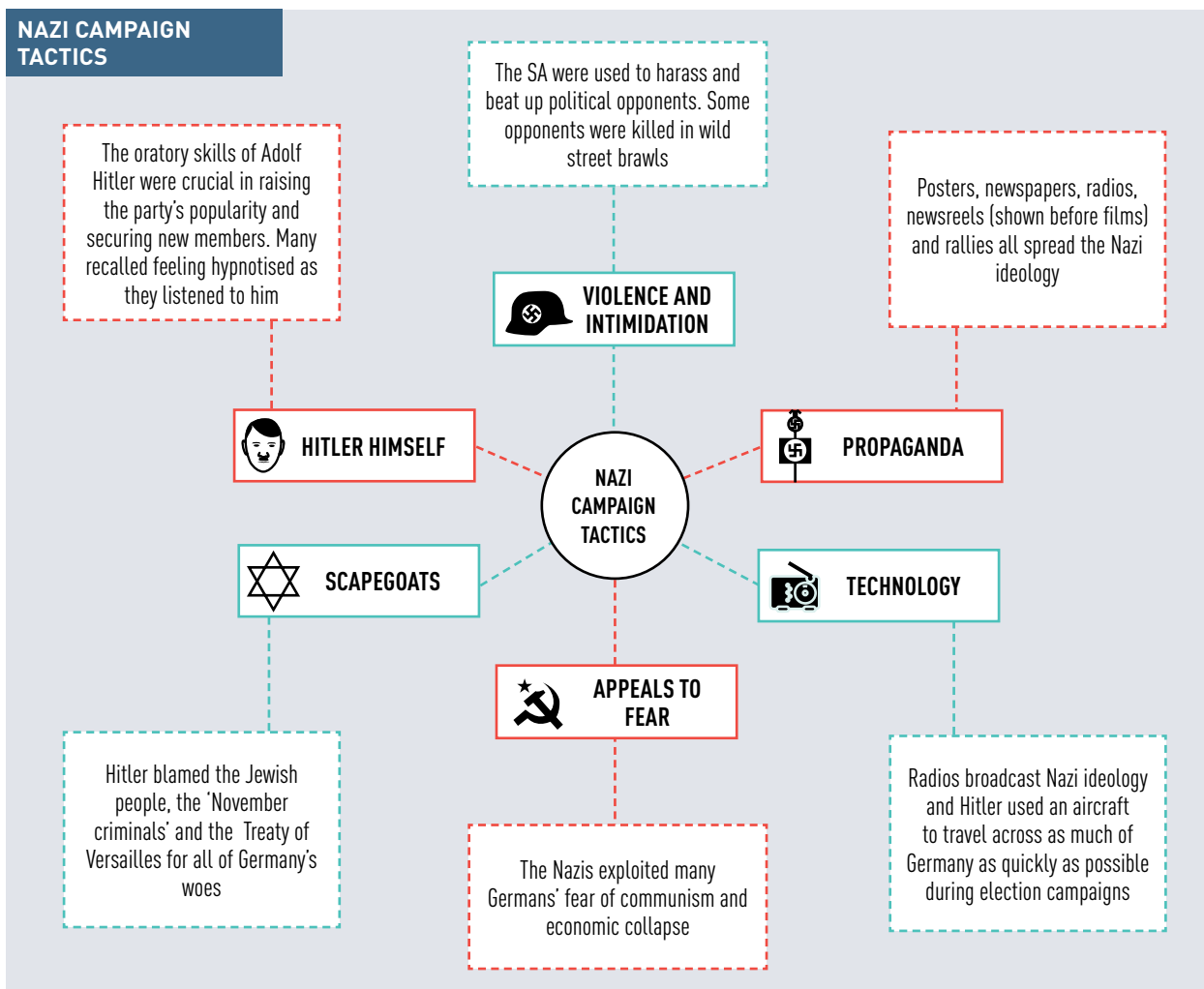


HITLER SPEAKS



NAZI PROPAGANDA

## NAZI CAMPAIGN TACTICS





Heinrich Brüning, chancellor, March 1930–May 1932.

## ARTICLE 48 AND BACKROOM DEALS

The chancellor at the time of the Nazi Party's breakthrough in the polls was Heinrich Brüning. A member of the Zentrum Party, Brüning was unwilling to work with either the radical left or right. Consequently, in order to pass laws, Brüning's only option was to ask President Hindenburg to resort to using Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution (see page 93). While technically legal, its overuse by Brüning (five times in 1930 and sixty-six times in 1932) weakened the democratic process in Germany and paved the way for authoritarian rule.<sup>42</sup>

Brüning was blamed by many Germans for the bank closures, business failures and massive unemployment of the early 1930s. In May 1932 Hindenburg was urged by conservative politicians to dismiss Brüning. His replacement was Franz von Papen, a deeply conservative aristocrat. In July, new Reichstag elections were held (see Source 3.35) and, in a campaign marked by considerable violence, the Nazis achieved their best result thus far. While the Nazis were now the largest party in the Reichstag, they did not hold an outright majority. Hitler demanded the chancellorship but Hindenburg kept Papen in this office. Hindenburg personally despised the leader of the NSDAP, and contemptuously referred to him as *der böhmische Gefreiter*, or 'the bohemian corporal' in reference to Hitler's Austrian background and the low rank he held in World War I.<sup>43</sup>

Papen struggled to muster any support in the bitterly divided Reichstag and was humiliated on 12 September when a vote of no confidence in his leadership was passed against him (512 votes to 42). As a result, Papen was forced to dissolve the Reichstag and call for new elections in November.

### SOURCE 3.35

Martin Collier and Philip Pedley, *Germany 1919–45* (Oxford: Heinemann, 2000), 77.

#### REICHSTAG ELECTION RESULTS 1932 AND 1933

| PARTY   | NOVEMBER 1932 (584 SEATS) |                 | MARCH 1933 (647 SEATS) |                 |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------|
|         | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE        | NUMBER OF SEATS | PERCENTAGE OF VOTE     | NUMBER OF SEATS |
| KPD     | 16.9%                     | 100             | 12.3%                  | 81              |
| SPD     | 20.4%                     | 121             | 18.3%                  | 120             |
| DDP     | 1.0%                      | 2               | 0.9%                   | 5               |
| Zentrum | 11.9%                     | 70              | 11.2%                  | 74              |
| BVP     | 3.1%                      | 20              | 2.7%                   | 18              |
| DVP     | 1.9%                      | 11              | 1.1%                   | 2               |
| DNVP    | 8.3%                      | 52              | 8.0%                   | 52              |
| NSDAP   | 33.1%                     | 196             | 43.9%                  | 288             |

#### DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler was not eligible to sit in the Reichstag in the 1920s because he was not a German citizen. He renounced his Austrian citizenship in 1925 but was unable to secure German citizenship. Technically he was *staatenlos*, or 'stateless'. He only became a naturalised German in April 1932 when he announced his candidacy for the presidency.

The outcome of the November elections suggested that the Nazis had already peaked in terms of their popularity. Hitler was desperate to be appointed chancellor before support for the NSDAP fell any further and election-fatigue set in. As Joseph Goebbels noted in his diary, 'We must come to power in the foreseeable future. Otherwise we'll win ourselves to death in elections.'<sup>44</sup> Still opposed to Hitler, von Hindenburg replaced Papen with Kurt von Schleicher on 2 December. Schleicher was a former army officer who had served under Hindenburg during the war. However, Papen wanted his revenge on Schleicher—whom he blamed for his losing the office of chancellor—and conspired to have him removed. Papen knew he had no chance of reclaiming the chancellorship himself in the short-term; he needed to promote someone whom he thought he could control.

On 4 January 1933, Papen met with Hitler and they struck a deal: Hitler would replace Schleicher as chancellor and Papen would serve as vice-chancellor. Papen managed to convince von Hindenburg that Schleicher lacked the support of the army and conservative landowners. The elderly von Hindenburg (he was now eighty-four) sacked Schleicher on 28 January. Two days later, Hitler was appointed chancellor with the support of a coalition of right-wing parties. Papen was duly appointed vice-chancellor and believed that he could control Hitler from behind the scenes. Goebbels was typically cynical and ruthless when he wrote in his diary: 'The stupidity of democracy. It will always remain one of democracy's best jokes that it provided its deadly enemies with the means by which it was destroyed.'<sup>45</sup>



Kurt von Schleicher, chancellor, December 1932–January 1933.



Franz von Papen, chancellor, May–November 1932.

### SOURCE 3.36

Hindenburg officially appoints Hitler Chancellor.

## ACTIVITY

### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Describe how Hitler is dressed. Compare his attire with what he is wearing in Source 3.29. Explain why Hitler wore different types of clothes on different occasions.
2. How useful is this source in explaining why Hitler was appointed chancellor?



HITLER'S RISE TO POWER



HITLER'S SPEECHES

## THE PATH TO DICTATORSHIP

**ADOLF HITLER:** 'I have given myself this one goal—to sweep these thirty political parties out of Germany.'

Despite being appointed chancellor, Hitler did not yet have total control of the German political system. The NSDAP did not have an outright majority in the Reichstag and only two of the twelve cabinet ministers were Nazis. Moreover, Hindenburg had already dismissed several chancellors since 1925 and could easily do the same to Hitler. Looking for an absolute majority in the Reichstag, Hitler called for new national elections to be held on 5 March. Before that occurred, however, Hitler was given a golden opportunity to strengthen his grip on power.

### THE REICHSTAG FIRE

On the night of 27 February 1933, the Reichstag building was gutted by fire. A young Dutch communist named Marinus van der Lubbe was arrested at the scene and charged with arson. At the time, some accused the Nazis of deliberately lighting the fire or letting van der Lubbe into the building as an excuse to crack down on their political opponents. The real cause of the fire will probably never be known. However, what is of greater significance is how the Nazis cynically exploited the opportunity. Hitler and Göring, the minister in charge of the police in Prussia, quickly pointed to a larger communist plot. Through Hindenburg's use of Article 48, Hitler suspended personal freedoms and liberties and gave police the power to hold suspects without trial. Anti-Nazi newspapers and radio stations were shut down and hundreds of Hitler's opponents were locked up. In spite of these heavy-handed tactics, the Nazis failed to secure the outright majority they needed in the March Reichstag elections (see Source 3.35). Hitler was forced to rule in a coalition with the DNVP.

#### SOURCE 3.37

The Reichstag in flames, 27 February 1933.



### THE ENABLING ACT

Undeterred by this setback, Hitler pressed on with his goal of gathering all power to himself by passing the Enabling Act. In order to make the necessary changes to the constitution, however, Hitler needed two-thirds of the vote in the Reichstag. With the KPD and SPD deputies holding 200 seats, this would be impossible. Hitler won over the moderate-right and centre parties with promises to respect religious and moral values. When the Reichstag deputies met on 23 March in the Kroll Opera House to vote on the Enabling Act, the left-wing deputies—those who weren't in prison—were prevented by the SA from entering. The Enabling Act was passed by 444 votes to 94 and came into force the next day.

**THE ENABLING ACT, 24 MARCH 1933**

The Reichstag has passed the following law ... The requirements of legal Constitutional change have been met, it is being proclaimed herewith.

**ARTICLE 1.** In addition to the procedure outlined for the passage of legislation in the Constitution, the Government also is authorised to pass laws ...

**ARTICLE 2.** Laws passed by the government may deviate from the Constitution ... The prerogatives of the President remain unchanged.

**ARTICLE 3.** The laws passed by the government shall be issued by the Chancellor and published in the official gazette ...

**SOURCE 3.38**

"The Enabling Act," German History in Documents and Images, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=1496](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1496)

**DID YOU KNOW?**

The actual title of the Enabling Act was 'The Law for Terminating the Suffering of the People and Nation'.

This act essentially gave Hitler and his cabinet of ministers the power to make laws by side-stepping the Reichstag and the constitution. In effect, it gave Hitler the dictatorial powers he had always demanded. He could now run Germany the way he ran the Nazi Party—as the undisputed leader.

**GLEICHSCHALTUNG**

As an important part of his efforts to control political and social life in Germany, Hitler initiated a policy of *Gleichschaltung*, or 'coordination.' This meant bringing all aspects of life into line with the ideologies of National Socialism. The Nazis passed a series of laws in order to realise this goal. Some of the key laws were:

**7 April 1933**

*Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service:* Jews and political opponents of the regime were thrown out of the civil service.

**2 May 1933**

*The abolition of the German trade union movement:* Trade unions were banned and replaced by the German Labour Front (DAF), which was completely controlled by the Nazis.

**14 July 1933**

*The abolition of all political parties except the Nazi Party and the Law Against the New Establishment of Political Parties:* These two laws saw all political parties in Germany, except the NSDAP, declared illegal, and no new parties could be established to replace them.

**January 1934**

*Law for the Reconstruction of the German States:* All state governments were abolished. The national government in Berlin was now the only legitimate source of political authority in Germany.

**April 1934**

*Control of the legal system:* The Nazi government established People's Courts to deal with crimes against the state, such as treason. There was no right to appeal in these courts.

**ACTIVITY****CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. Explain how the laws passed under the *Gleichschaltung* initiative would have helped the Nazis increase their power.
2. Which elements of the Nazi ideology were represented under the *Gleichschaltung* laws?
3. Explain how the Enabling Act gave Hitler and the Nazis dictatorial powers.



## THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES



Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS.

## THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

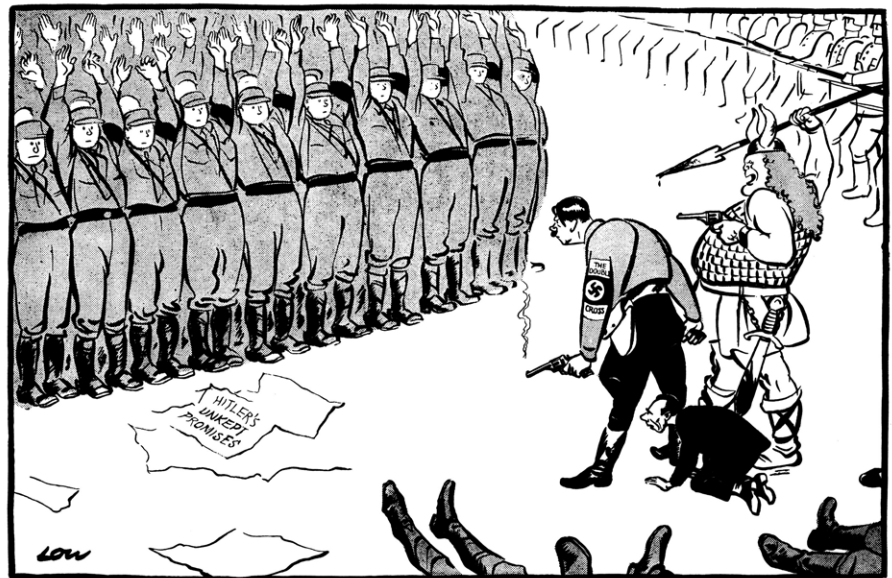
Strangely enough, the last obstacle in Hitler's path to securing total power came from *within* the NSDAP. The SA had grown to about 2 million men by 1934. Röhm, who had wanted a social and economic revolution along with Hitler's political revolution, was frustrated by the deals Hitler had made with politicians like Papen and Hindenburg. Conservatives and business leaders who supported the Nazi regime were concerned by the SA's thuggery, while the army felt that the SA wanted to replace them—which was actually one of Röhm's goals. These groups, along with powerful individuals in the Nazi Party, such as Göring and Himmler, convinced Hitler to get rid of Röhm and curtail the influence of the SA. On the night of 30 June, Hitler ordered the SS to strike.

On what became known as the 'Night of the Long Knives,' Röhm was arrested; he was shot dead two days later. Other SA leaders and potential opponents of the regime, such as former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher, were also arrested and executed by SS troops. In all, about 180 members of the Nazi Party and 200 other 'enemies' of the regime were killed in the purge.

### ➔ SOURCE 3.39

#### THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES

A political cartoon by David Low, which appeared in the British *Evening Standard* on 3 July 1934.



#### DID YOU KNOW?

Goebbels was always conscious of the impact of propaganda. In the lead up to the March 1933 election he wrote: 'The struggle is now a light one since we are able to employ all the means of the State. Radio and [the] press are at our disposal.'

### ACTIVITY

#### SOURCE ANALYSIS

1. Identify two individuals depicted in this cartoon.
2. Explain the meaning of the phrase 'They salute with both hands now.'
3. By referring directly to the image, and using what you know about Hitler's rise to power, explain why Hitler ordered the execution of Röhm and other political opponents.
4. Evaluate the usefulness of this source in helping you understand how Hitler achieved total power in Germany. Refer to other interpretations in your response.

## DER FÜHRER

On 2 August 1934, President von Hindenburg died. Hitler moved quickly to abolish the office of president and assumed all the powers of state as *der führer*. On the same day, all German soldiers were required to swear a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler rather than to the people or the constitution. The army leadership permitted this largely in gratitude that Hitler had eliminated the threat posed by the SA. On 19 August, a plebiscite was held which asked the German people to approve of Hitler becoming führer. Almost 90 per cent voted 'Yes.' Hitler was able to exploit this result to legitimise his dictatorship. He was now the sole and undisputed master of Germany.



BIOGRAPHICAL  
STUDY

### SOURCE 3.40

*Cited in Greg Lacey and Keith Shephard, Germany 1918–1945: A Study in Depth (London: John Murray, 1997), 74.*

### THE SOLDIER'S OATH TO THE FÜHRER

I swear by God this sacred oath: that I will render unconditional obedience to the Führer of the German Reich and people, Adolf Hitler, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath.

### SOURCE 3.41

New inductees taking the oath at the beginning of their national service in a barracks of Berlin.



### CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How many members did the SA have prior to the Night of the Long Knives?
2. How did Hitler make use of Hindenburg's death to increase his power?
3. Explain the significance of the German army swearing a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler.

### EXTENSION

Explain the possible range of reasons for the high 'Yes' vote in the plebiscite of 19 August.

### SKILLS: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Explain how the Nazi regime differed from the Weimar government. To what extent did the lives of Germans change? You could write a comparative report, or present your ideas and evidence in a table.

ACTIVITIES

# HITLER'S TRIUMPH: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

Significant historical events such as the origins of a war or the outcomes of a revolution are incredibly complex. They typically have a large number of contributing factors, ranging from political and economic to social and cultural. The roles played by key individuals and historical accident—events or consequences that were unforeseen by contemporaries—have also featured prominently in academic debate in recent decades. The triumph of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in 1933–34 understandably provoked an intense debate among historians. Since the end of World War II, historians have studied the relevant evidence and presented a number of different interpretations as to how an aimless, failed art student came to hold supreme authority in one of the most developed countries in the world.

William L. Shirer was an American journalist who lived and worked in Europe from the 1920s. He lived in Germany from 1934 to 1940 and published his history of the Third Reich in 1960. At that time the *Sonderweg*, or 'special path' theory of the origins of the Nazi Party was popular. This held that German political, social and cultural evolution, even as far back as Martin Luther in the sixteenth century, was predisposed to authoritarian forms of government. Democracy in Germany, this argument holds, was essentially impossible because of the historical mindset of its people.



PROPAGANDA POSTCARD:  
SONDERWEG



## SOURCE 3.42

William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*  
(London: Pan Books, 1964), 1081.

### WILLIAM L. SHIRER

The course of German history ... made blind obedience to temporal rulers the highest virtue of the Germanic man and put a premium on servility.

A British historian, A.J.P. Taylor, also argued that the seeds of the Third Reich were buried deep in Germany's history.

## SOURCE 3.43

A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History*  
(London: Hamish Hamilton, 1945), i.

### A.J.P. TAYLOR

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.

From the late 1960s and through the 1970s, many historians began to question this interpretation. German historian Martin Broszat argued that political structures and ideals since the Bismarkian era (from the mid-nineteenth century onwards) stifled the gradual development of German democracy. This became known as the 'structuralist' approach.

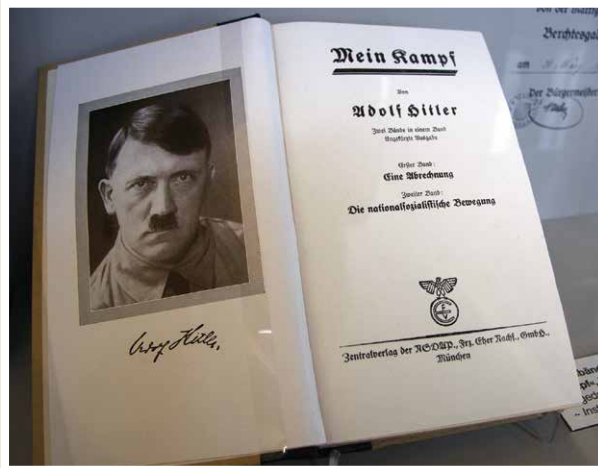
## SOURCE 3.44

Martin Broszat, *Hitler and the Collapse of Weimar Germany*  
(Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers, 1987), 148.

### MARTIN BROSZAT

What provided the glue for the fateful and never harmonious alliance between the conservative elites and the Nazi mass movement which made Hitler's chancellorship possible, was the aggressive rejection of Weimar parliamentarianism and of the forces that had shaped the Republic. These latter forces ... had been decried as 'Reich enemies' as early as the Bismarkian Empire ... [The Nazis] thereby made a radical break with the slow evolution towards a more democratic society, which had set in during the late Wilhelmine period and had continued under the Weimar Republic.

Later generations of historians rejected the *Sonderweg* and structuralist approaches as too deterministic, as they failed to account for the role played by key individuals and the impact of their decisions. Historians such as Ian Kershaw and Richard J. Evans suggested that the Nazi triumph wasn't inevitable; Hitler was given power by conservative politicians who naively and tragically thought they could control him for their own purposes.



↑ Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

### SOURCE 3.45

Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London: Penguin, 2003), 451.

#### RICHARD J. EVANS

For all his electoral successes, there has never been any doubt that Hitler came into office as the result of a backstairs political intrigue. The Germans did not elect Hitler Reich Chancellor. Nor did they give their free and democratic approval to his creation of a one-party state ... Crucial to the whole process [i.e. Hitler's coming to power] was the way in which democracy's enemies exploited the democratic constitution and democratic political culture for their own ends.

### SOURCE 3.46

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris 1889–1936* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 424.

#### IAN KERSHAW

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 by any other actions on the part of the Nazi leader played a larger role in placing him in the Chancellor's seat.

## ACTIVITIES

### EXTENSION

1. Historical figures are referred to on these pages that you may not be familiar with: Martin Luther, the German kaisers and Otto von Bismark. Research the life of one of these figures and write a report on their contribution to German history. Pay particular attention to how their actions and decisions might supply evidence for either the *Sonderweg* or the structuralist approach to German history.
2. Run a class debate on the idea of inevitability in history. Can certain events in the past be deemed to have been 'always going to happen'? What consequences does this have for the notion of free will and the place of unforeseen events? Refer to Hitler's rise to power and any other relevant historical events when you present your case.

### SKILLS: HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS

1. Explain how the views of Shirer and Taylor are similar.
2. How are their interpretations similar and different to that of Broszat?
3. How would a member of either a centre or left-wing political party during the Weimar period respond to the *Sonderweg* and structuralist interpretations of German history?
4. In Evans' account, who were 'democracy's enemies'?
5. In the extract from Kershaw, who were 'those with regular access to the corridors of power'?
6. Which historical interpretation do you find most convincing? Support your response with reference to evidence.

# CONCLUSION



From 5–10 September 1934, the Nazi Party held a rally in the city of Nuremberg (depicted here). The theme of the rally was *Tag der Einheit und Stärke* (Day of Unity and Strength) and it was intended to symbolise the triumph of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party. From obscure beginnings in a small, provincial town in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hitler rose to become the absolute dictator of one of the most powerful nations in Europe. The NSDAP, which dwelt on the fringe of German politics for over a decade, thrived on economic and social disruption. It was not until the advent of the Great Depression that the Nazis started to gain sufficient electoral support. By 1932 they were the largest party in the Reichstag and Hitler was demanding to be appointed chancellor.

Backroom deals by cynical, conservative politicians who thought they could control Hitler saw him elevated to the office he so greatly desired. However, Hitler proved to be less manageable than the conservatives expected. He ruthlessly eliminated political opponents and passed several laws that brought Germany into line with the ideals of National Socialism. After the death of von Hindenburg, Hitler declared himself *der führer* and secured the loyalty of the army via a personal oath of allegiance. He also legitimised his regime with a huge majority in a national plebiscite. Having conquered his own people, Hitler could now set about fulfilling the ambitions he had outlined in *Mein Kampf* and conquer the people of Europe.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Using the information presented in this chapter, create a mind map or flowchart that visually demonstrates the sequence of events that led to Hitler becoming *führer* in January 1933. Include primary source quotations and images or diagrams for each event.

## EXAM PRACTICE

Using three or four points:

1. Explain the consequences of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch for the NSDAP. Provide evidence to support your answer.
2. Explain some of the key features of the National Socialist ideology. Provide evidence to support your answer.

## ESSAY

Write an essay, based on evidence, on one of the topics below.

- Historian Ian Kershaw argues: 'The First World War made Hitler possible.' To what extent did that conflict, and its aftermath, create the pre-conditions necessary for Hitler's rise to power? Support your response with evidence.

- The Weimar Republic fell victim to an extremist, authoritarian party due to the flaws contained within its own Constitution. To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.
- Historian Richard J. Evans argues: 'Hitler came into office as the result of backstairs political intrigue.' To what extent do you agree with this statement? Use evidence to support your response.

## EXTENSION

Research the life of one of the following individuals and present a report to the class on their role in the early years of the Nazi Party (1919–1934). Your presentation should be three to five minutes in duration and make effective use of visual sources:

- Joseph Goebbels
- Hermann Göring
- Heinrich Himmler
- Rudolf Hess
- Ernst Röhm
- Erich Ludendorff
- Anton Drexler.

## TEST



QUIZ – CHAPTER 3

## FURTHER READING

Alan Bullock, *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Harmondsworth, 1952.

Bullock's book on the leader of Nazi Germany was one of the first academic works published on the topic and remains a classic in the field. Bullock believed that for Hitler, ideology was a means to an end. He was only concerned with obtaining power and would do anything to realise that goal.

Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, London, 2003.

In this highly readable book, Evans argues that the Nazis came to power as a direct result of political intrigue by naïve conservatives. The subsequent establishment of the Nazi regime enabled Hitler to transplant his race-based ideology onto the pre-existing structures of the German state.

Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, London, 1922.

Hitler completed his book while he was in the political wilderness in the mid-1920s. Part dubious autobiography, part political diatribe, *Mein Kampf* is a tediously written and hate-filled book. It provides a window into the mind of one of the greatest criminals in history.

Ian Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris 1889–1936*, London, 1998.

The first book in a two-volume work, Kershaw's *Hubris* is a vital resource. Kershaw seeks to explain the emergence of the Nazi Party through an analysis of both Hitler's personality and the conditions in Germany after World War I that proved to be such fertile soil for Hitler's ideas.

William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, London, 1960.

Shirer was an American journalist who lived in Germany from 1934. He argues that the roots of the Third Reich were buried deep in German history. While this view was challenged by the next generation of historians, Shirer's book is still a valuable and interesting resource.