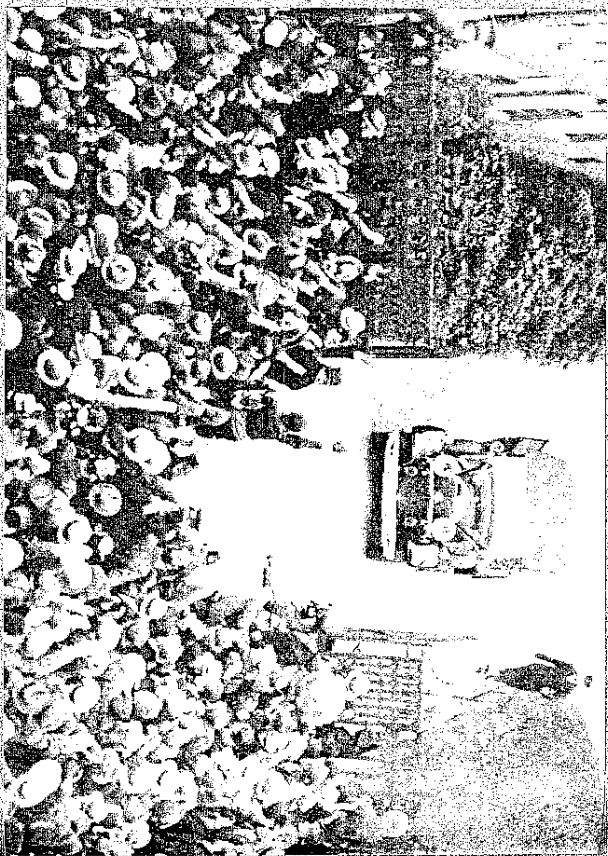


Chapter

The creation of a Nazi dictatorship



This public demonstration, organised by Gregor Strasser, was held in 1933.

Source 3

And what did Dr. H. bring us? The news that his double, Hitler, is Chancellor of the Reich! And what a Cabinet!! One we didn't dare dream of in July. Hitler, Hugenberg, Seidler, Papen!! On each one of them depends part of Germany's hopes... It is so incredibly marvellous that that I am writing it down quickly before the first discordant note comes, for which has Germany ever experienced a blessed summer after a wonderful spring?... Huge torchlight procession in the presence of Hindenburg and Hitler by National Socialists and Stahlhelm... This is a memorable 30 January!

From the diary of Frau Sominz, 30 January 1933

Source 3

Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far into the corner that he'll squawk.

Papen, January 1933

It seems like a dream. The Hitler's appointment was greeted with an enthusiasm bordering on the hysterical in some quarters of Germany. What we must remember, however, is that at no point, even in the election of March 1933, when propaganda and intimidation reached new heights, did a majority of the German people vote for Adolf Hitler. Some of those who did not support him reassured themselves with the thought that the balance of power lay in the hands of non-Nazis such as Papen and Hugenberg. Others expected that the Nazi spell in power would be short-lived. These included the communists who believed that a communist revolution would shortly follow. Such hopes help to explain the lack of open opposition to Nazi policies during 1933.

Goebbels' diary entry for 30 January 1933

Introduction

Hitler's appointment was greeted with an enthusiasm bordering on the hysterical in some quarters of Germany. What we must remember, however, is that at no point, even in the election of March 1933, when propaganda and intimidation reached new heights, did a majority of the German people vote for Adolf Hitler. Some of those who did not support him reassured themselves with the thought that the balance of power lay in the hands of non-Nazis such as Papen and Hugenberg. Others expected that the Nazi spell in power would be short-lived. These included the communists who believed that a communist revolution would shortly follow. Such hopes help to explain the lack of open opposition to Nazi policies during 1933.

Hitler could hardly have been described as a dictator in January 1933. Papen's claim that 'We have hired him! demonstrated his belief that Hitler had been 'tamed' and could pose little threat. By the end of 1934, however, the Nazi dictatorship was in place. There were three main steps in this transformation:

- Step One: January – March 1933. **Control at the centre**
- Step Two: April – July 1933. **Control beyond the centre**
- Step Three: January – August 1934. **The final stage**

Key questions

- How did the Nazis establish a dictatorship in Germany?
- Why did nobody stop them?
- What impact did this have on the people?

The Nazis in January 1933

Strengths and weaknesses

The Nazis were by far the largest party in the Reichstag in January 1933 and this was their main source of strength. For a nationalist coalition to work, Nazi support was vital. The Nazi Party also held the key positions in the Cabinet. Hitler was, of course, Chancellor whilst Frick was Interior Minister in the Reich and Goering was Interior Minister of Prussia. However, the party also had weaknesses. Despite their numbers in the Reichstag they did not possess an overall majority, even if they were supported by the nationalists. This could prevent Hitler from changing the Weimar Constitution as a two-thirds majority was required for this. In addition, whilst Nazis held the key posts in the Cabinet they still only numbered three out of twelve. Finally, Hitler or any other Nazi Cabinet member could be sacked by the President at any point. Their survival was by no means guaranteed at this stage.

Hitler's aims

Hitler had never made any secret of the fact that, once in power, he wished to destroy the democratic system. In a speech following the Nazis' electoral success of 1930, Hitler declared that parliament for us is not the goal, but the means to an end. This desire to destroy democracy was shared by all his fellow Cabinet members and the first step in this direction had already been taken by his predecessors. With regard to his other aims, in his first major speech to the German people as Chancellor, he was careful to tone down both his anti-Semitism and aggressive foreign policy. He focused instead on more reassuring themes such as the importance of the family and the evils of communism.

Source 4

The national government sees as its first and foremost task the restoration of the unity and will of our people. It will preserve and protect the fundamentals on which the strength of our nation rests. It will preserve and protect Christianity, which is the basis of our system of morality, and the family, which is the germination cell of the body of the people and the state. It will disregard social rankings and classes in order to restore to our people its consciousness of national and political unity and the responsibilities that ensue. It will use reverence for our great and glorious past and pride in our ancient traditions as a basis for the education of German youth. In this way it will declare a merciless war upon spiritual, political, and cultural nihilism (absence of belief). Germany shall not and will not sink into anarchistic communism ...

The national government will undertake the great task of the reorganisation of the economy of our people through two great four-year plans: rescue of the German farmer to ensure the means of feeding the nation and thereby guaranteeing its existence; rescue of the German worker through a mighty and comprehensive attack on unemployment ...

In its foreign policy, the national government regards its highest mission to be in the safeguarding of the right to life of our people and therefore to regain the freedom of our people. As it is determined to end the chaotic conditions of Germany, it will cooperate with other nations in order to establish a state of equal value and equal rights within the community of nations ...

Reich President General Field Marshal Von Hindenburg has called on us to employ our courage in order to bring about this re-ascendency of the nation ...

Hitler's appeal to the German people 31 January 1933

The consolidation of power: Step One

The election campaign

Almost immediately, Hitler made it clear that he was not a sleeping partner within the Cabinet. Within days he succeeded in persuading Hindenburg to call for a new election and grant his government powers to suspend meetings and ban newspapers. This began a five-week election campaign that witnessed the death of 69 people, the destruction of the Communist Party and a barrage of propaganda and intimidation. Determined as he was to give the *appearance* of legality, Hitler refused to allow state funds to finance the Nazi campaign and instead looked to industrialists for support. This time it was forthcoming. Election posters were produced in bulk and Goebbels made particular use of the radio, ensuring that all Hitler's speeches were broadcast by all stations with his own commentary helping the listener to appreciate the enthusiasm of Hitler's audiences. The 'Goebbels', it was suggested by some jokers, should be added to existing weights and measures, signifying the amount of power needed to turn off 100,000 radio sets at the same time.

Political opponents were given short shrift. In Prussia, Goering established control of the police (over half of Germany's entire force) by insisting they serve Nazi interests, sacking them if they did not, and bringing in an extra 50,000 men, mainly SA members. Goering was open about his control over the

What's at stake?

In what ways does Hitler seek to reassure the German people in Source 4?

- What kinds of people is Hitler trying to appeal to?
- Give some examples of how Hitler avoids laying down any specific policies.
- How does Hitler try to emphasise the legitimacy or right that he has to be in power?
- Give an example of the persuasiveness of Hitler's language.
- How useful is this source when examining Hitler's aims and tactics in 1932?

➤ **1932** Goering joins the Hitler 1933
 ➤ **31 Jan** Hitler becomes Chancellor
 ➤ **31 Jan** Hitler's appeal to the German people broadcast over the radio

➤ **1 Feb** Hitler persuades Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag
 ➤ **Feb** Hitler's government acquires power to ban political meetings and newspapers
 ➤ **Feb** Decree gives Goering almost full control over Prussia
 ➤ **Feb** Hitler persuades industrialists to finance election campaign
 ➤ **25 Feb** Reichstag fire
 ➤ **28 Feb** Decree for the Protection of People and State repeals civil liberties

➤ **5 Mar** Thälmann, leader of SPD, and other members arrested
 ➤ **5 Mar** Election - Nazis win 43.9% of the votes but still have to inaugurate
 ➤ **Mar** First concentration camps announced by Interior Minister Fick
 ➤ **15 Mar** Goebbels joins Cabinet as Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda
 ➤ **21 Mar** Day of Potsdam
 ➤ **23 Mar** Enabling Act passed by the Reichstag

Every bullet that now leaves the mouth of a pistol is my bullet. If you call that murder, then I am the murderer, for I gave the order and I stand by it. Goering's forces were amongst those used to intimidate and terrorize Nazi opponents.

The Reichstag fire

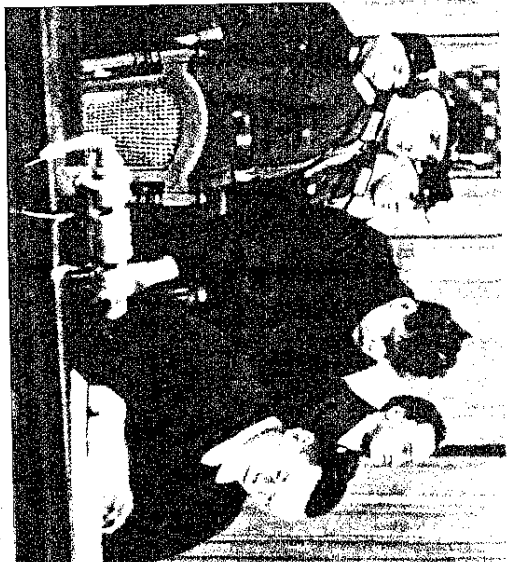
On 27 February, a young Dutchman, Marinus van der Lubbe, was caught in the act of burning down the Reichstag. The Nazis immediately claimed that Lubbe was part of a communist conspiracy, although during the trial in Leipzig later that year, no evidence was found to substantiate this claim. Some historians have pointed to the very useful timing of the fire, days before the election, which enabled the Nazis to arrest many communists and undermine their election campaign (they lost 19 seats). General Franz Halder, who attended a birthday lunch for Hitler in 1942, claimed that Goering boasted during the meal 'The only one who really knows the Reichstag is I, for I set fire to it'. During the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-46, however, Goering flatly denied all knowledge of either the lunch or the conversation, claiming that it was complete nonsense, given that the Reichstag was known to every representative in the Reichstag. We still do not know the full truth of the matter. In 1962 an investigation concluded that Lubbe acted alone but eighteen years later, in West Berlin, Lubbe was acquitted altogether! In the end, the question of who started the fire is of limited historical significance. What is significant, however, is the way in which the Nazis exploited it to their advantage. By the following morning, 4000 communists had been arrested and Hitler had alarmed Hindenburg into granting an emergency decree which suspended many civil rights. The Decree for the Protection of People and State gave the government the power to arrest individuals without trial, search private homes, censor post and telephone calls and continue to restrict freedom of assembly and expression. There was nothing *illegal* about the decree. It was enacted according to the Weimar Constitution, at a time when rule by decree was not regarded as unusual, by a President who had been in power for eight years.

Source 5

Mainius van der Lubbe during his trial for assembling the Reichstag fire.

What's at stake?

➤ Of what use is this photograph to a historian researching the Reichstag fire?



Document exercise: The Reichstag fire

The mystery of the Reichstag fire

Much has been written (about the Reichstag fire) and more will be before the full truth is known – if it ever is. Van der Lubbe was personally involved, but what his motives were, who prompted him, whether he acted alone, is still disputed. Contemporary opinion was in no doubt whatever. It was known that an underground passage connected Goering's office with the Reichstag itself. It was widely believed that the leader of the Berlin SA, Karl Ernst, had led a fire-party through this passage to assist van der Lubbe in his work. Within hours, the wags of Berlin had devised a riddle: 'Why did van der Lubbe take his shirt off? 'Because' was the answer, 'it was a brown one'. It was also of interest that, at a later date, Karl Ernst and all those allegedly implicated in the fire were executed by Nazi firing-squads....

Adapted from *Knaves, Fools and Heroes*, 1974, the memoirs of Sir John Wheeler-Bennett, a British diplomat, who witnessed the fire himself

The reactions of the Nazi elite

It so happened that as I drove through the Brandenburg Gate on my way to visit my girlfriend I saw the flames burst through the dome of the Reichstag. Thus I had a ringside seat at a momentous event in European history... Memories of that evening are of the great bulk of Goering, swathed in a trench-coat, dashing into the burning Reichstag, where I already was, and of the bemused expression on the face of Papen, who arrived later and found that, even though he was premier of Prussia, his energetic Interior Minister had on his own responsibility taken measures which meant the end of all constitutional government in Germany....

Adapted from *Intensity Fair*, 1938, by Douglas Reed, a left-wing English Journalist

The view of the Prussian police

The voluntary confession of van der Lubbe prevented me from thinking that he needed any helpers. Why should not a single match be enough.... But this specialist had used a whole knapsack full of inflammable material. He had been so active that he had had several dozen fires... he had rushed through the big corridor to lay more fires under the old leather sofas. During this hectic activity he was overpowered by Reichstag officials... I reported on the results of the first interrogations of Van der Lubbe – that in my opinion he was a maniac. But with this opinion I had come to the wrong man; Hitler ridiculed my childish view. That is something really cunning, prepared a long time ago, the criminals have thought all this out beautifully, but they've miscalculated, haven't they, Comrades!

From an account by Rudolf Diels, head of the Prussian political police, written after the war

The view of a middle-class member of the public

Goering, like an old greying servant, reported gravely the dreadful murder plans of the Communists... They started with the Reichstag. Fire broke out in twenty-eight places... They wanted to send armed gangs to murder and start fires in the villages... Poison, boiling water, all tools from the most refined to the most primitive, were to be used as weapons... If Italy, America and England were wise, they should send us money to fight Bolshevism out ruin will be their ruin!

From the diary of Frau Sornitz

Party	% of vote	Seats
NSDAP	43.9	288
DNVP	8.0	52
DVP	1.1	2
Z	14.1	74
DDP	0.9	5
SPD	18.2	120
KPD	12.2	81

No one can escape the emotion of the moment. Father too is deeply impressed. Mother has tears in her eyes...
 Dad is completely unmoved... he considers the whole thing simply a put up job...
 'Have you got it coming to you', says the 21 year old. I remain silent, saddened and torn.

Erich Ebermeyer, a dramatist, describes the Day of Potsdam and its impact on him and his family who were generally unsympathetic to the Nazis

Comprehension in context

- Study Source A. Using this source and your own knowledge, explain why some people at the time believed that the Nazis were responsible for the Reichstag fire.
- Comparing the sources To what extent do Sources B and C support the view that the Nazis were responsible for the fire?
- Assessing the sources To what extent, and why, do Sources A, B, and C provide reliable evidence about the fire?
- Making judgements Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess how successfully the Nazis used the Reichstag fire to their own advantage. (Note: You may wish to read up to 'Step Two' before answering this question.)

The March election

The election results were surprising, given the circumstances. As you can see from the figures in the margin, the Nazis once more failed to achieve a majority and even with the support of the DNVP, they could not master the two-thirds support in the Reichstag required to amend the Constitution. Nevertheless, Hitler claimed it as a great victory and a mandate to take forward the 'National Revolution', whilst grass-roots members celebrated by seizing local administrative posts and terrorizing any suspected opponents. Jewish department stores were looted and attacks were made on the Press of the opposition. Hitler, claiming that the local authorities were clearly incapable of maintaining order, promptly replaced legal governments with Reich Commissioners. Nevertheless, he was beginning to feel uneasy at the scale of disorder, mindful of the support he received from big industrialists and army leaders who frowned upon extra-legal terrorist activity. On 10 March, Hitler appealed for the end to violence, stressing that the further progress of the national uprising will be guided and planned from the top. In an attempt to reassure his more conservative supporters, an elaborate ceremony, known as the Day of Potsdam, was staged in the Potsdam Garrison Church to celebrate the opening of the new Reichstag. Hindenburg, the ex-Crown Prince and several old army generals were present and Hitler's speech stressed the great traditions of Germany for which he claimed, he stood and represented. It was a propaganda triumph.

The Enabling Act

On 5 March, the Reichstag effectively voted itself out of existence by passing the Enabling Act. This Act gave the Cabinet the power to enact laws without the Reichstag's permission for four years. It effectively killed off the Weimar Constitution and gave Hitler the powers of a dictator. He was no longer dependent on presidential decrees; he could enact any law he chose, for four years at least. The Enabling Act was, astonishingly, passed by the Reichstag by 444 votes to 94 – but why?
 ● **Communists and socialists:** 81 KPD and 26 socialist deputies were refused admission into the Reichstag. In the end, only the remaining SPD deputies voted against the Act.
 ● **Nazi deal with the Centre Party:** Hitler promised to respect the Catholic Church in return for the support of the Centre Party. They took Hitler at his word and gave him their backing.

● **Intimidation by the SA:** The Freil Opera House, where the vote took place, was surrounded by members of the SA and SS, who also lined the walls inside, issuing threats to the deputies.

● **Limiting provisions:** There were provisions in the Act which would limit it e.g. the clause stating that it would become invalid after four years. This encouraged some deputies to vote for the Act, although the limiting provisions were subsequently ignored.

Hitler had established control of the centre of politics. He was filling his Cabinet with Nazis and he could now effectively dispense with the Reichstag. Now Hitler turned to the rest of Germany.

The consolidation of power: Step Two

Why was society 'brought into line'?

Society in the Weimar Republic could be described as *plural*. A number of different interest groups were allowed to exist within the state - interest groups representing all areas of human activity, from jobs to religious beliefs to leisure pursuits. These groups, such as the Church, trade unions and political parties, were potentially quite powerful and could exert pressure on the government in a variety of ways. Think about the following groups and consider how they could have blocked government policies:

trade unions, the Church, other political parties, the civil service, local government, courts and judges.

To take one of these examples, trade unions could, of course, organize a strike in order to achieve better wages or working conditions. Indeed, they nearly brought Berlin to a standstill during the Kapp Putsch of 1920. In a healthy democracy, these pressures are seen as vital in communicating the will of the people to the government, whose job it is to act in the best interests of the people it represents. Hitler, on the other hand, did not want to see his power limited in such a way. He was not interested in lines of communication from the people to government. His argument was always that he knew what was in the long run, in the people's best interests and should therefore be allowed to have complete freedom to act in those interests. In reality he wanted to extend his dictatorship across the whole country by eliminating potentially troublesome interest groups and embarking on a process of 'Nazification'. The proper term for this policy was *Gleichschaltung* which literally meant 'bringing into line'.

This process had already started by April 1933, as state governments and police forces were essentially brought under Nazi control. But Hitler was intent on giving his National Revolution an air of legality. All actions had to be defined in legal terms in the form of government acts. Hence the actions in the states were retrospectively legalized in laws issued at the end of March and the beginning of April. The German historian Brandler talks of a 'flood of legality' with reference to the events of 1933, which encouraged Hitler's conservative allies to support him.

How was the Gleichschaltung implemented?

● **Trade unions:** On 2 May 1933, members of the SA and the SS occupied union offices and effectively abolished all existing trade unions. A new organization, the German Labour Front (DAF), was set up by the Nazis and led by Robert Ley. Membership was compulsory. Employees lost the right to negotiate with employers over wages and working conditions.

- 1. 1933: Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service
- 2. 1933: Trade unions dissolved
- 3. 1933: DAF set up
- 4. 1933: Centre Party dissolves itself
- 5. 1933: Prussia SPD outlawed
- 6. 1933: Concordat between Germany and Vatican
- 7. 1933: Nazi Party the only official party allowed to exist in Germany

Actions similar to *Gleichschaltung* had already been taken by the government before 1933. As you may have read in the margin box on p.156, Japan closed down the left-wing state government of Prussia in the summer of 1932. Its functions were simply absorbed into the national government, making the Nazis' task that much easier when they attempted to do the same throughout Germany after 1933.

● **Political parties:** The Communists were effectively banned after the Reichstag fire. By the time the Enabling Act was introduced, only the SPD were openly opposing Hitler and even they voted in support of Hitler's foreign policy statement in May in an attempt to survive. However, on 22 June 1933, the SPD was outlawed as a 'party hostile to the nation and state'. The other parties dissolved themselves. In July, a decree was passed officially making Germany a one-party state.

● **States:** Immediately after January 1933, Nazis began to infiltrate state governments, which were given the power to issue laws without consulting the Landtage (state parliaments). This was followed up with the appointment of powerful Nazi *Reichsstatthalter* (Reich governors). In January 1934, the Landtage were abolished altogether and the state governments were made subordinate to the Reich government in Berlin.

● **Civil service:** Hitler was dependent on an efficient and well-established bureaucracy, and many civil servants retained their posts. Membership of the Nazi Party was not compulsory until 1939. However, a Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, issued in April 1933, enabled those whose political obedience or racial purity was in question to be dismissed. Most officials of Jewish descent lost their jobs. Twelve and a half per cent of the Prussian civil service was dismissed on political or racial grounds.

Were all groups 'brought into line'?

By the end of July 1933, most of the major interest groups in Germany had been brought under Nazi control. In addition to those outlined above, Nazi organizations absorbed teaching associations, intellectual workers, peasant groups and even employers, who became part of the Estate of German Industry. The Reichstag had, of course, already suffered in the first stages of consolidation, as had the press. Only two groups survived the onslaught the Church and the army. In both cases, Hitler felt he had too much to lose by alienating their support. The German people felt strong loyalty to the Church and Hitler succeeded in neutralizing the role of the Catholic Church in politics by signing a Concordat with the Pope on 8 July. This agreement exchanged a promise from Hitler that the Church would be left to run its own affairs, including Catholic schools, for a promise from the Pope that the Church would not interfere in political matters. Not surprisingly, the Catholic Church was heavily criticized for this policy in subsequent years. In fact, as you will see in Chapter 10, neither the Protestants nor the Catholic Churches escaped *Gleichschaltung* entirely, but they were never completely dismantled.

The other group escaping co-ordination was the army. Hitler was too dependent on its support and vital that it was the only body who could still force him out of power. He was also dependent on a well-trained and highly disciplined force to implement his ambitious foreign policy. In its turn, the army was grateful for a leader who valued them and wished to expand their size and their role, so this was a relationship based on mutual benefits. It was not until Germany began to lose the Second World War that the army began to turn against Hitler.

How powerful was Hitler by the end of 1933?

Copy and complete the chart below using information from this chapter. The first example has been done for you. Below the chart are other examples to put in the first column. You may be able to think of more.

Who could threaten Hitler's power?	How did the Nazis try to remove this threat?	Were the Nazis successful?
The Cabinet	Nazis held the most important posts in the Cabinet and Hitler brought more Nazis in, e.g. Goebbels. Hitler was pursuing policies that the non-Nazi members agreed with, e.g. weakening the Reichstag.	Yes
Hitler because out of 12 members only three were Nazis		

- The Reichstag could refuse to pass laws
- The Press could stir up opposition in newspaper articles
- The other political parties could stir up opposition
- The elite could withdraw their support for Hitler if they disapproved of his methods
- The state governments and parliaments could block Nazi policy at a local level
- The police could refuse to carry out Nazi orders
- The trade unions could arrange strikes
- The Church could condemn Nazism from the pulpit
- The army could overthrow the Nazis by force

Document Exercise: A legal revolution?

There are two issues here. Firstly, was the Nazi revolution a legal one, and secondly, was it a revolution at all? The document exercise below will focus on the first of these two questions, but you may wish to reflect on the second question yourself. Think about what we mean by revolution. Generally, we use it to describe a period of complete change, usually at a political level. Did everything change in Germany during the Nazi consolidation of power? What changed and what stayed the same?

THE ENABLING ACT

In addition to the procedure for the passage of legislation outlined in the Constitution, the Reich Cabinet is also authorised to enact laws ... The national laws enacted by the Reich Cabinet may deviate from the Constitution provided they do not affect the position of the Reichstag and the Reichsrat ... This law comes into effect on the day of its publication. It ceases to be valid on 1 April 1937.

Hitler had increased his power at an incredible speed. Even Goebbels was astounded, writing in his diary in April 1933. The Führer's authority is now completely in the ascendancy in the Cabinet. There will be no more voting. The Führer's personality decides. All this has been achieved much more quickly than we had dared to hope ...

Activity

- Using your completed chart, discuss the following questions:
1. What possible threats to Hitler's power had not been removed by the end of 1933? Why?
 2. Were all these groups forced to accept Hitler or were some acting out of self interest?
 3. How complete was Hitler's power by the end of 1933?

A historian on the legality of the Nazi dictatorship

rule by decree, which reached its highest point on 28 February, and the conquest of the states were followed by the permanent suspension of the division of powers by virtue of the Enabling Act, which ended the Presidential dictatorship and marked the beginning of the one-man dictatorship. Contrary to the illusions and apologies of professors of public law then and now, the one-man dictatorship had as little legal validity as the rule by decree.

Bracher, The German Dictatorship, 1969

Source 3

SA and SS violence in the state of Brunswick

From March 1933 the atmosphere in the town and the countryside became unbearable. One brawl after another. There were growing rumours that the *Volksfreund* – the [SPD] Party, trade union and publishing house building of the workers – was to be raided by National Socialists ... There, lorries with SA and SS had driven up at 4.05pm. The porter promptly closed the doors. But the Nazis broke the big display windows and pushed into the building through the holes. They opened fire inside the building with a number of rifles and revolvers. During this, the 28-year-old salesman, Hans Sule, the advertising manager of the Advertising Union, Berlin, was killed by a shot in the stomach. He had received an order from his superiors to leave the threatened district of Brunswick and to travel to Sarstedden on the same day.

From an account published by the SPD in exile

Hitler's response to the violence

During these days Hitler indignantly and brusquely rejected complaints voiced by his nationalist partners about the uncertainty over the law of the hand and the mounting SA terror. When Papen, too, spoke about SA infringements against foreign citizens during a telephone conversation on 19 March, Hitler reacted the next day with a wilting reply to the Vice-Chancellor. He had the impression, Hitler argued in his written response, that at the moment there is a systematic barrage aimed at scolding the National Socialist uprising. Then he enlarged on the fact that the 'regrettable' infringements bore no comparison to the 'high treason' of the November criminals and the suppression of the NSDAP in the Weimar period.

Broszat, The Hitler State, 1981

Examination-style questions

1. **Comprehension in context**
Study Sources A and B. Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain why Bracher claims that the Enabling Act had 'little legal validity'.
2. **Comparing the sources**
Describe how Sources C and D differ in the views they advance about the legality of Nazi actions and explain their differences.
3. **Assessing the sources**
How useful is Source A to an historian studying the Nazi consolidation of power in 1933?
4. **Making judgements**
Using these sources and your own knowledge, explain whether or not, in your opinion, the Nazi 'revolution' was legal.

The impact of the Nazi take-over on the German people

The diaries of Viktor Klemperer 1933-1941

Viktor Klemperer was a German Jew living in Dresden during the Nazi years. He was professor of Romance languages at Dresden Technical University until he was dismissed in 1935 as a result of Nazi laws. Most Jews living in Dresden had either emigrated during the 1930s or else been deported to camps in 1941. Klemperer survived deportation because he was married to a non-Jew. Even so, he only escaped deportation in 1945 thanks to the British bombing of Dresden, in the confusion of which Klemperer was able to escape to Bavaria where American troops had arrived. Klemperer kept a diary all his life. His intention was not to record events which were recorded in the Press, but instead to focus on what touched him personally. He planned to use this diary to write his memoirs, although only his memoirs from 1881-1918 were ever published. The following extracts focus on the very first months of Nazi rule and illustrate how rapidly the life of this particular German was turned upside down.



Viktor Klemperer and his wife Eva in 1940

5 January

Friday evening
30 January: Hitler Chancellor. What up to election Sunday on 5 March. I called terror was a mild prelude. Now the business of 1918 is being excruciatingly repeated, only under a different sign, under the swastika. Again it's astounding how easily everything collapses... eight days before the election the clumsy business of the Reichstag fire - I cannot imagine that anyone really believes in communist perpetrators instead of paid Nazi work. And on top of that the never-ending propaganda in the street, on the radio etc... No one dares say anything any more, everyone is afraid... How long will I keep my post?

Friday morning
The defeat in 1918 did not depress me as greatly as the present state of affairs. It is shocking how day after day ruled acts of violence, breaches of the law, barbaric opinions appear quite undisguised as official decree. The socialist papers are permanently banned. The liberals' tremble... And no one stirs, everyone trembles, keeps out of sight.

Monday evening about midnight

At the cinema after a long gap: Hindenburg in front of troops and SA men on Sunday the 12th, the day of the war dead. When I saw him filmed a year ago, the President, his hand on the wrist of his escort, walked somewhat stiffly, but quite firmly... an old but vigorous man. Today the tiny, laboured steps of a cripple. Now I understand it all... I am now completely certain that Hindenburg is no more than a puppet, that his hand was already being guided on 30 January.

Every new government decree, announcement etc. is more shameful than the previous one... In Breslau Jewish lawyers forbidden to appear in court.

Monday evening

The government is in hot water: 'Racist propaganda' from abroad because of the Jewish campaign. It is constantly issuing official denials... But then it openly threatens to proceed against the German Jews if the unschuld-making by 'World Jewry' does not stop. Meanwhile there is no bloodshed in the country, but oppression, oppression, oppression. No one breathes freely any more, no free word, neither printed or spoken.

The Nazis organized a boycott of Jewish shops and professions on 1 April.

Monday evening

What can we learn from these extracts about the impact of Nazism on the lives of the German people?

What do the extracts suggest about people's response to the Nazis?

How valuable is this diary in finding out about the Nazis' first few months in power?

Thursday
During the day the National Socialist' boycott call has been announced. We are hostages... I feel more shame than fear, shame for Germany. I have always felt a German... In a topshop a children's ball with the swastika.

Friday evening

Ever more hopeless. The boycott begins tomorrow. Yellow placards, men on guard. Pressure to pay Christian employees two months' salary, to dismiss Jewish ones.

Monday evening

On Saturday red posters on the shops: 'Recognised German-Christian enterprise'. In between them closed shops. SA men in front of them with triangular boards: 'Whoever buys from the Jew, supports the foreign boycott and destroys the German economy.'

Friday morning

The pressure I am under is greater than in the war, and for the first time in my life I feel political hatred for a group (as I did not during the war), a deadly hatred... No one dares write a letter, no one dares make a telephone call, we visit one another and weigh up our chances.

Monday

The awful feeling of 'Thank God, I'm alive'. The new Civil Service 'law' leaves me, as a front-line veteran, in my post - at least for the time being... Amnemat Kohler was here yesterday.

Filled with the greatest bitterness. She tells us how identical the male and female nurses in her hospital are. They sit around the loudspeaker. When the Horst Wessel Song is sung (every evening and at other times too), they stand up and raise their arms in the Nazi greeting...

Monday

(after lecture to three people) On Saturday I read out my 'Afterword'. Shock. How could I keep something like that in the house. Kohler advised: hide it behind a picture - But what shall I do with my diaries? I wait from one day to the next. Nothing sits. Sometimes I lose all heart and believe that this regime will last after all and outlive me.

Saturday

At the Blumenfelds yesterday evening. Dignant mentally. Jule Sebba and his family go to Palestine in August.

Friday morning

... the 'Hitler greeting' made obligatory. Obligatory only within 'the place of service'... an officer I saw employees constantly raising their arms to one another.

Saturday

I simply cannot believe that the mood of the masses is really still behind Hitler. Too many signs of the opposite. But everyone literally cringes with fear... Everyone fears the next person may be an informer.

Extracts from Klemperer, *I Shall Bear Witness, The Diaries of Viktor Klemperer 1933-1941*, 1999

The consolidation of power: Step Three

By the end of 1933 Hitler's power was extensive but not total. His power was potentially at risk from three sources: the President, the army and the SA (Sturmabteilung). Hindenburg could still, in theory, dismiss Hitler and the other Nazis in the Cabinet, the army could use its strength to force Hitler from office and the SA could endanger Hitler's relations with the army by carrying out further acts of hoodlumism and demanding more power for themselves. By the end of 1934, all three problems had been largely solved.

The SA and the 'second revolution'

When Hitler became Chancellor in January 1933, the SA, which represented the more working-class element of the Nazi Party, felt that their efforts on the streets had been vindicated. Now Germany would undergo the political and social revolution that she so badly needed and members of the SA would be rewarded with positions of authority and a status equivalent to that of the German army. Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA and long time friend of Hitler, was vehement in his expression of such beliefs. He was determined not to allow the SA to become simply a propaganda tool which took part in shining torchlight processions and impressive parades. Instead, he wanted the SA to merge with the army, with him in overall control, so that the German revolution could be taken forward. He felt badly let down when it became clear that in fact, Hitler had no intention of carrying through a 'second revolution' once his political power had been established, nor was he prepared to reward the SA with a higher status. In fact, the SA was becoming something of an embarrassment to Hitler were, his tactics of street brawls and hoodlumism at odds with Hitler's efforts to appease the German elite and portray his actions as legal. Relations between Röhm and Hitler reached a low point in early 1934, when Röhm declared privately to a friend:

Adolf is a swine. He will give us all away. He only associates with the reactionaries now... Getting money with the East Prussian generals. They're his cronies now... Adolf knows exactly what I want. I've told him often enough. Not a second edition of the old imperial army. Are we revolutionaries or aren't we?... If we are, then something new must arise out of our clan, like the mass armies of the French Revolution. If we're not then we'll go to the dogs. We've got to produce something new, don't you see that? Don't you understand that what's coming must be new, fresh and unused? The basis must be revolutionary. You can't inflame it afterwards. You only get the opportunity once to make something new and big that'll help us lift the world off its hinges. But Hitler puts me off with fair words.

Meanwhile, the army was making clear its opposition to the behaviour of the SA. In February, for example, General von Blomberg alerted Hitler to the growing military activities of the SA in areas that the Treaty of Versailles had demilitarized. Hitler had to make a choice. Either he attempted to win the full backing and trust of the army by effectively removing power from the SA or he risked alienating the army by remaining loyal to the SA. In the end, Hitler chose the army.

What happened in the night of 30 June 1934?

- 1. The Night of the Long Knives
- 2. The SA was abolished
- 3. Hindenburg died
- 4. Hitler proclaimed himself Chancellor and President of Germany

What happened in the night of 30 June 1934?

- 1. What exactly is Röhm saying in Source 7?
- 2. How do you think Hitler would have reacted to this?

For more information on the SS, see page 181.

Paul Strasser and Schleicher had betrayed Hitler in 1932. In an attempt to split the Nazis, Schleicher persuaded Strasser to offer the government the support of the left wing of the Nazi Party which Strasser represented. It was only with Hitler's direct intervention that Strasser abandoned the plan. Hitler forgave neither of them for such treachery.

Source 8

A British cartoon about the Night of the Long Knives, published on 3 July 1934.

The Night of the Long Knives

On the night of 30 June, Röhm and other leaders of the SA were shot by members of the SS. It was clear that the army lent a helping hand by providing transport and weapons, although it was probably unaware that it was supporting what became a bloodbath. Hitler seized the opportunity to remove any old enemies and men such as Strasser and Schleicher were amongst the 400 murdered that night. Afterwards, Hitler claimed that he had responded to a treason plot and was thanked by the Cabinet for his determined and courageous action. Both Blomberg, in the name of the army, and President Hindenburg thanked Hitler publicly for his actions. Thus, Hitler had succeeded in gaining the approval and support of the army which was to be so crucial if he was to achieve his ambitious aims abroad. The SA ceased to be a serious military presence and became what Röhm had feared – a propaganda showpiece which could be displayed at events like the great Nuremberg rallies. The SA was also wheeled in to carry out acts of vandalism and thuggery against oppressed minorities, in particular the Jews in 1938. But their role as the prime para-military wing of the party was eclipsed by the SS, originally conceived as Hitler's personal bodyguards in 1925. Their role in the Nazi state is considered in more detail in the next chapter.



Think about it

- 1. Study Source 8 carefully. Using the information on these two pages to help you identify:
 - The figures standing behind Hitler
 - The victims whose feet appear at the bottom of the cartoon
 - The men with both arms raised
 - The line of men in the top right hand corner
- 2. What is meant by 'upkept promises'? Was this a justified accusation?
- 3. What is the meaning of the phrase 'They salute with both hands now'?
- 4. How accurate is this cartoon as a portrayal of the Night of the Long Knives?

Document exercise: The Night of the Long Knives

Hitler outlines his plan for the SA

... a militia as Rohm suggested would not be the least bit suitable for national defence. He sought to establish this by examples from military history. In the course of this he came to his own experience. The hastily and superficially trained division to which he belonged in 1914 as a private, had come to grief at Langemarck with the most heavy losses. Therefore he was resolved to raise a people's army, built up on the *Reichswehr* (army), rigorously trained and equipped with the most modern weapons.... This new army would have to be ready for any defence purposes after five years, and after eight years suitable also for attacking. The SA must confine itself to internal tasks...

An account of Hitler's speech to SA leaders and army generals in February 1934

Notes concerning the murder of General von Schleicher

... I had a long conversation with Attorney-General Tezclaf about the motive for the murder... as far as we were concerned, there were only two possibilities. First, that General von Schleicher was murdered by Rohm's henchmen... Or on the other hand, that the same bunch that had taken steps against Rohm... had then also taken the opportunity to eliminate Schleicher. Attorney-General Tezclaf then expressly cautioned me at the end of our conversation that I should not mention this second possible motive... even though we were both fully convinced that the perpetrators could only have come from the ranks of the SS... The official press release from party headquarters had said that Schleicher committed suicide, but this was changed during the course of the afternoon to read that Schleicher had been shot in self-defence...

A reconstruction of events made by an investigating officer in 1952

Evidence on Schleicher's suicide about the events of 30 June 1934

Tekky during the noon hour, possibly around 12.30, I was looking through the window toward the street, where I spotted two gentlemen. I asked what they wanted, to which they replied that they 'had to see General von Schleicher'... The gentlemen kept insisting more and more... I replied that 'I would go and see' I then made any way into the general's study, while being followed by the strangers. Once we had arrived at the study, the strangers stood close behind me and asked Herr von Schleicher... if he were General von Schleicher. The general said yes and turned his body in order to see the men who had asked the question. At that very moment shots rang out. I do not know what happened then, because I was terrified. I screamed and ran out of the room... When I afterward again went back to the room I found Frau von Schleicher and the general, both shot and lying on the floor...

Statement given by Schleicher's cook, a witness

Hitler justifies his actions to the Reichstag

Without informing me... Chief of Staff Rohm entered into relations with General Schleicher through an utterly corrupt and dishonest go-between... It was General Schleicher who spelled out the secret aims of Chief of Staff Rohm...

The present regime in Germany is not to be tolerated. Above all, the army and all national associations must be united in a single band. The only man to be considered for such a position is Chief of Staff Rohm.

Extract from Hitler's speech to the Reichstag in July 1934

Examination-style questions

- 1 Comprehension in context**
Study Source A. Using the source and your own knowledge, explain why Hitler wanted the SA to confine itself to internal tasks.
- 2 Comparing the sources**
How far, and for what reasons, do Sources B and C differ in their account of Schleicher's death?
- 3 Assessing the sources**
Source D provides an inaccurate version of events and is, therefore, of little value to the historian. How far do you agree?
- 4 Making judgements**
Using the sources and your own knowledge, to what extent do you agree that the Night of the Long Knives was necessary for Hitler's survival as dictator of Germany?

Hitler becomes 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.

Oath taken by the army in 1934

President Hindenburg died on 2 August. Hitler combined the post of President with that of Chancellor, naming himself 'Führer' (leader) of Germany. This automatically made Hitler the Supreme Commander of the German army. Not only did the army accept this action, but its members also swore an oath of loyalty to their Führer on 2 August. Such an oath was not taken lightly; the soldiers meant what they were saying and believed that it was their duty to uphold it. So Hitler had succeeded in getting the army absolutely on his side. Thus, by 1934, his power was seemingly complete, with all potential challenges to his authority removed. But it is one thing to establish oneself as a dictator and quite another to sustain that role in the long term. The strategies adopted by Hitler and the Nazis are outlined in the next chapter.

Conclusions

- By the end of 1934 Hitler and the Nazi Party had succeeded in establishing a powerful dictatorship in Germany. This was achieved through three steps:
 - Step One: January – March 1933: control at the centre. During this period, Hitler gained the power to bypass the Reichstag and enact laws on the authority of his Cabinet. Civil liberties were suspended to enable him to arrest and imprison political opponents.
 - Step Two: April – July 1933: control beyond the centre. During this period, Hitler attempted to bring any potential enemies under control. Organized opposition was now almost impossible.
 - Step Three: January – August 1934: the final stage. During this period, Hitler brought the SA family under his control and won the support of the army. He became the Führer of Germany after Hindenburg's death.

Although opposition to Hitler was never entirely removed, he was now in a strong enough position to begin the transformation of society he wanted and to pursue the foreign policy that lay at the heart of his ambitions.