

The rise of the Nazi Party

and its consolidation of power 1929 - 1934.

In this topic we will focus upon three key questions:

- i) What was the impact of the Weimar period on the rise of the Nazis?
- ii) How and why did Hitler get appointed Chancellor in January 1933?
- iii) How did the Nazis consolidate their power during 1933 - 1934?



The political and economic problems of the Weimar Republic

A republic is a country without a king or queen. The **Weimar Republic** is the name given to the government of Germany from the end of WW1, when the German Kaiser abdicated (left his position) in November 1918, to Hitler's rise to power in January 1933.

Although the Weimar Republic was a democracy (ruled by the people), with one of the fairest voting systems in Europe, it gave rise to one of history's most extreme dictatorships (rule by one man or party) - Adolph Hitler and the Nazi party.



Life in Germany at the start of the Weimar Republic could hardly have been worse. WWI ended with the German armies in retreat and serious food shortages. Many people in Germany feared a Communist revolution, similar to what had happened in Russia. The new government left Berlin and moved to the safer city of Weimar. The government soon returned to Berlin but was still known as the Weimar Republic.

Weimar Germany



The first major thing the government had to do was sign the hated **Treaty of Versailles** in June 1918. This treaty (agreement) brought the international talks about WWI to an end. The terms of the treaty humiliated the German people and the Weimar government was blamed and despised by many Germans for signing it. It was not a good start for the new government.

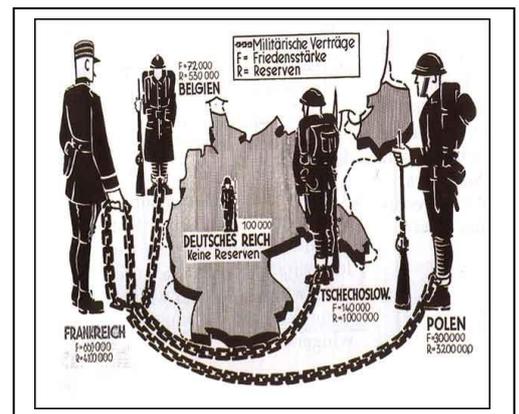


Palace of Versailles

Treaty of Versailles

- German army reduced to 100,000 men. No tanks or airforce.
- Navy reduced to 36 ships. No U-boats (submarines) allowed.
- Germany lost all overseas land.
- Germany had to pay reparations (fines for war damages).
- Germany lost land to Denmark, Poland, France, and Czechoslovakia.
- Included in the lost land was 12.5% of German population and 50% of Iron and Steel Industry.
- Finally, Germany had to admit to the infamous **War Guilt Clause 231**, which stated that Germany had to admit the war was totally her fault.

Source A: The immediate effect of the signing [of the treaty] was a blaze of anger in the German press and depression among the people. In Berlin an atmosphere of profound gloom settled on the city... Serious mob violence was in evidence, especially in Berlin and Hamburg, throughout the week of the signing of the peace treaty. (*New York Times, July 1919*)



Germany had no say in the Treaty. It was a **diktat** - a dictated peace. The Weimar politicians had to sign it or Germany would have been crushed.





Many German people would always link the Weimar Republic with the Treaty and the economic and social problems that it led to. In the eyes of many Germans the hunger, defeat and humiliation of Germany was the Weimar Republic's fault - they wanted rid of it.

Some called for the Kaiser to come back, some looked towards the Communist left and some looked for a new system - towards right wing **National Socialism**.

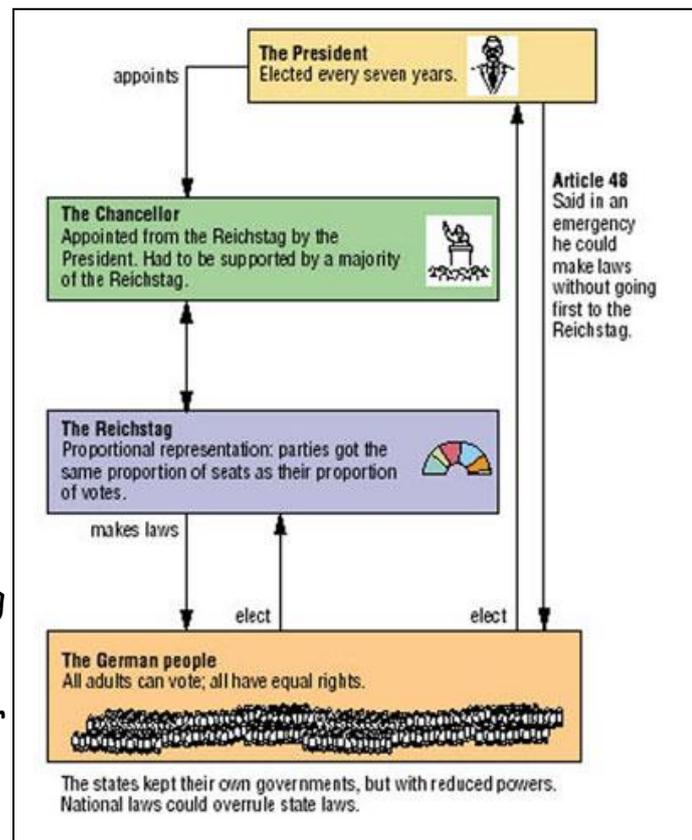


The Weimar Constitution

The Weimar **Constitution** (rules of government) was one of the most democratic in Europe. The **Reichstag** (parliament) was elected by men and women over the age of 20. Political parties were awarded seats in the Reichstag using a special type of voting system called **Proportional Representation (PR)**. It was a very fair system of voting that awarded seats in proportion to the number of votes that were cast. So if a party got 10% of the votes, they would get 10% of the seats in the Reichstag.

To win an election and form a government in the Reichstag, a party had to have a majority share of the vote. However, there were over twelve political parties in Germany at the time so no one party ever won an election outright.

If a party wanted to form a government they had to make a **coalition** (alliance) with another party. This led to weak and unstable



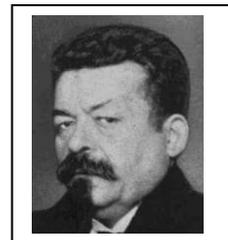


They killed
Kenny!

governments as the coalition parties would often disagree and the government would stop working. There were over nine elections during Weimar's fourteen year history, since 1997 in the UK we have only had 3 elections.

In control of the government was the **Chancellor** (a bit like our Prime Minister). The Chancellor chose the **Cabinet**, which consisted of jobs like Defence Minister, Finance Minister and Foreign Minister.

However, the top job in the Weimar Republic was the **President**. The President was elected by the German people and would serve for 7 years. The President had special political powers. During times of political crises, usually when coalition governments argued, the President could use **Article 48** of the Constitution. Article 48 meant the President could pass laws without consulting anyone. The President also appointed the Chancellor.



Ebert

Weimar weaknesses exposed by the violent left!

Friedrich Ebert was the first Chancellor of Germany. He was a moderate socialist (left wing) politician. He believed in helping the people through peaceful law-making.

Nevertheless, Germany during 1918 - 1919 was not a peaceful place. It was a breeding ground for unhappiness, discontent and violence.

In January 1919 a violent communist uprising threatened Germany. Led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg the **German Communist Party**, also known as the **Spartacists** attempted an armed **putsch** - to take control of Berlin by using force. The Spartacists were named after the slave revolt of Spartacus during Roman times.





Ebert panicked! He needed help to get rid of the communists. He could not rely upon the army so he turned to the right wing **Freikorps**. The Freikorps were volunteer soldiers that were led by former officers of the German army. They were very angry and looking for a fight. By mid January the Spartacist putsch had been ruthlessly stamped out by the Freikorps and both Liebknecht and Luxemburg had been murdered.

The communist putsch highlighted the political weakness of the Weimar Republic. The republic could not control the violent political groups that were developing in Germany.



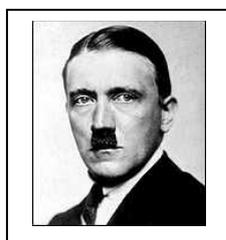
A rise in right-wing activity

Communist parties are called **left-wing** parties, parties which hold moderate views are called **centre** parties and parties which hold nationalistic views are called **right-wing** parties.

In March 1920, Dr. Wolfgang Kapp used his right wing Freikorps to stage an armed rising in Berlin. This time Ebert had to call on the German Army. However, the army refused to fire on the Freikorps (remember, many of the Freikorps had been German Army officers). It took a general workers strike to bring the putsch to an end. Again the **Kapp Putsch** showed that the Republic did not have control and between 1919 and 1923 there were over 354 political murders.

Enter Hitler

Adolph Hitler was born in Brannau, a small Austrian town near the German border in 1889. His father bullied him and his mother spoiled him. By 18 years of age he had dropped out of school and moved to Vienna, with the hope of becoming an artist. He failed to



Rise of the Nazis



get into Vienna Art Academy and subsequently ended up living as a tramp.

During his time in Vienna he began to develop his hatred for **Jews**. He also became interested in politics and was opposed to the ideas of socialism and communism. He became very **nationalistic** and disliked foreigners and their ideas.

He joined the German army in 1913 and served in World War One as a runner. It was a very dangerous job that involved taking messages to and from frontline trenches. He was wounded twice, by gas and bullet, and won 6 medals for bravery, including the distinguished Iron Cross 1st Class - the top German medal of the time.



After the war Hitler was sent to spy on a small party called the German Workers Party. It had only a few members but Hitler liked their ideas and joined the party. Soon after he started speaking at the parties meetings and quickly impressed people with his rousing speeches.

By 1921, Hitler had become leader of the party and changed the name to the **German Workers National Socialist Party - Nazis** for short. The party adopted an ancient symbol of power as its emblem - the swastika.



The party employed a squad of ex-army Freikorps called the **Sturmabteilung (SA)**. They were also called 'brown shirts' or 'storm-troopers' (not the white dudes from star wars). The SA was led by the violent and predatory homosexual Ernst Rohm.



Hitler said that Germany needed to be a strong nation once again. He blamed the loss of the war and the Treaty of Versailles on the weak politicians and he also blamed the Jews. He said Jews and politicians were 'germs' that needed to be got rid of.



The Munich Putsch



A putsch, if you hadn't already worked it out, is an armed takeover.

By autumn 1923 Hitler had 15,000 followers. These included General Ludendorff an army leader from WW1, Herman Goering a famous WW1 fighter pilot, Ernst Rohm a Freikorps officer and Joseph Goebbels an intelligent man with a dark side.

In the Bavarian state capital Munich, Hitler decided to make a bid for power. Munich was the stronghold of the Bavarian Nationalist Party. They promised to help Hitler.

On 8th November 1923, Hitler, supported by 600 supporters marched into a Bavarian Nationalist Party meeting that was being held at the Burgerbrau beer hall in Munich. Hitler declared that he was setting up a new government. With a gun pointed at him the Bavarian Nationalist leader Gustav von Kahr agreed to help Hitler. There was some shouting out from the crowds, some in support of Hitler and some against, but it looked like Hitler might take control.



However, through the night von Kahr changed his mind and informed the local authorities. By the morning Hitler was surrounded by the police and a local army unit that had come to arrest him. Refusing to accept defeat Hitler and 2,000 supporters marched from the beer hall to the city centre.



The two groups met, shots were fired, some Nazis were killed and Goering was wounded in the leg. The putsch had failed. Hitler dislocated his shoulder and was arrested along with others, including General Ludendorff.

Hitler's attempt to take control had failed. For a moment he contemplated suicide, but decided to face his charges. He was put on trial for treason and could have been sentenced to death.

Source B: Instead of working to achieve power by an armed rising, we will have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag. If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the result will be guaranteed by their own constitution. Sooner or later we will have a majority, and after that we shall have Germany. (**Hitler, in a letter from Prison 1924**)

Instead, however, he was sentenced to 5 years imprisonment at Landsberg Castle - of which he only served 9 months.

His prison term was a soft punishment, he was allowed visitors and during his time there he wrote his famous book '**Mein Kampf**' (My Struggle). It became a best seller and set out Hitler's main ideas, beliefs and aims. Furthermore, the putsch had gained national publicity - Hitler had become more widely known than before.

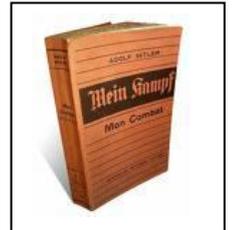
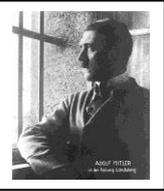
Hitler and 'Mein Kampf'

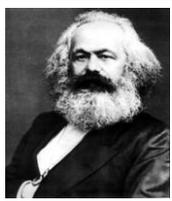
Whilst in prison Hitler realised that if he and his party, which was now banned, were to be successful and win power they would not be able to do it using force. They would have to alter their strategy, they would have to do it in a more regular way - try and get elected.

This meant that the Nazi ideology (philosophy/beliefs) had to be developed and written down for all to see - Hitler's response was 'Mein Kampf'.

1) **The Fuhrer Principle** - Germany must have one leader who is strong and has total power. He would restore German power and pride and set up a new German Reich (Empire).

2) **Social Darwinism / Master Race** - Human beings are divided into different races. The **Master Race** or the **Herrenvolk** are the **Aryans**. The Aryans are the Nordic people living in Germany and Scandinavia who are descended from Vikings and Medieval German Knights. Aryans were tall and athletic with fair skin, blonde hair and blue eyes. Inferior races like Jews and Slavs (Eastern Europeans) were called **Untermenschen** or **Sub-Human**. They were to be enslaved or destroyed and their lands taken for the benefit of the Aryan race.





Karl Marx

- 3) **Anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews)** - Hitler called the Jews the Semites. He said they threatened Germany and the World. He blamed them for Germany's defeat in WWI. They were inferior and should be destroyed before they destroyed Germany.
- 4) **Communism** - Karl Marx, a German Jew, had developed communism. Hitler saw communism as a Jewish World Conspiracy. Russia was a communist state and needed to be destroyed.
- 5) **Lebensraum (Living Space)** - Hitler said that Germany was overpopulated and needed more land and more resources. Germany therefore, must expand and take the land of the more inferior races in the east like Poland and Russia so German people could thrive.
- 6) **The Treaty of Versailles** - The treaty had been totally unfair on Germany. It had to be abolished and the land that had been taken from Germany must be given back. France had to be smashed.

Lebensraum the need for 'living space' for the German nation to expand.

A strong Germany the Treaty of Versailles should be abolished and all German-speaking people united in one country.

Führer the idea that there should be a single leader with complete power rather than a democracy.

Social Darwinism the idea that the Aryan race was superior and Jews were 'subhuman'.

Autarky the idea that Germany should be economically self-sufficient.

Germany was in danger from Communists and Jews, who had to be destroyed.

Economic Recovery under Stresemann 1924 -1929

The ending of World War One and the Treaty of Versailles crippled the German economy. The final **reparations** bill was fixed

at £6.6 billion, to be repaid at a rate of £100 million per year. Germany somehow managed to make the first payment, but failed thereafter.

France argued with Germany about the missing payments and subsequently marched their troops into the industrial area of Germany called the Ruhr. German workers went on strike.

Without work, the German workers relied upon the Weimar government for payment. The government could not afford to pay the workers so **printed more money** to pay them. However, the more money that was printed the **less valuable** it became. Soon the German **mark** (equivalent to our pound) was practically worthless.

For example in 1914, one US dollar was worth 4.2 German marks, after the war it was 9 marks. Astonishingly, by 1923 it was 4,200 billion marks to the dollar. This swift price rise is called **Hyperinflation**.

Hyperinflation, hit the middle classes in the pocket. Savings were wiped out as they were now worth nothing. They blamed the Weimar Republic.

By the end of 1923 Germany's economy was in a desperate situation. However, it began to recover in 1924, largely thanks to one man, **Gustav Stresemann**. Stresemann, more than any other politician managed to turn the German economy around.

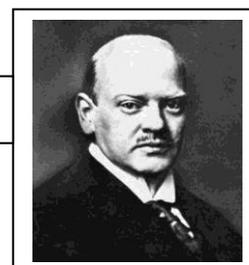
Nevertheless, he had done so by borrowing money from America. Now German finances were closely linked to what was going on in America - and you all know what happened there in 1929.



Rise of t



Stresemann





Wall Street Crash and Germany

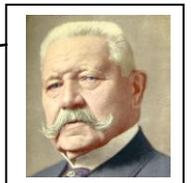
Shortly before his death in 1929, Stresemann had been keen to state how unstable the German economy was. He said it was 'only flourishing on the surface' and was 'in fact dancing on a volcano.' When that volcano erupted on the American Stock market in October 1929, the effects were felt right across the world and none more so than in Germany.

The **Wall Street Crash** destroyed economic recovery, dumped Germany into a deep depression and unemployment rocketed. Furthermore, the economic crisis led to political crisis and it brought about the **end of Parliamentary democracy**.

Elections, Coalitions and Political Scheming 1929 1932

The great depression did not only have an economic impact. It also led to a political crisis. Between 1930 and 1932 there were three general elections as the weak **coalition** governments proved unable to deal with the problems that Germany faced.

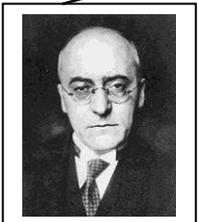
In March 1930, President Hindenburg had appointed Heinrich **Bruning** as Chancellor. Bruning could not secure a coalition so Hindenburg used **Article 48** to give Bruning Presidential powers.



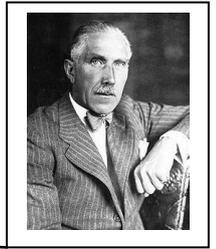
In giving Bruning these powers Hindenburg had marked the end of Parliamentary democracy and had unintentionally paved the way for Hitler to take control.

By May 1932 Bruning had resigned. His government becoming more and more unpopular as it was unable to sort out Germany's problems.

A general election was called in July 1932 and the Nazi party won 230 seats in the Reichstag which made them the largest party



with 37% of the vote. Hitler demanded that he be given the position of Chancellor. Hindenburg, however, hated Hitler and appointed Franz von Papen instead.



Nonetheless, von Papen was unable to form a coalition government strong enough to pass any laws. Hitler and the Nazis would not support him, so another general election was called in November. Although von Papen was returned as Chancellor, his position was weak. The Defence Minister Kurt von Schleicher persuaded Hindenburg that von Papen had lost the support of the army and that he instead should become Chancellor. Hindenburg agreed.



Von Papen was furious, so much so, that he made a deal with Hitler to try and get von Schleicher out.

Von Schleicher lasted only 57 days as Chancellor and resigned in January 1933. Now Hindenburg was left with no option but to appoint the only leading politician left - Adolph Hitler.

Von Papen had told Hindenburg to appoint Hitler, saying things to him like '*we are hiring him*' and they thought they could control him. They could not have been more wrong. After a great deal of **political scheming**, in **January 1933**, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany.



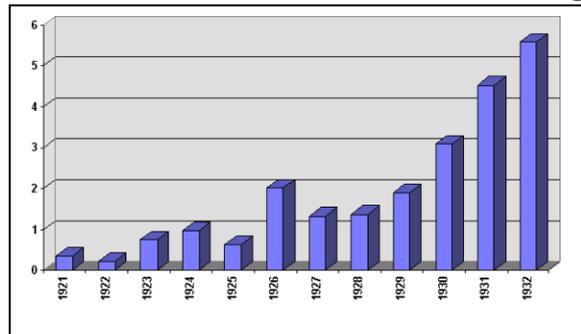
What was so appealing about Hitler's and the Nazis?

Although the Munich putsch had failed in giving Hitler power, it had been successful in raising the profile of the Nazi party and in particular Hitler.

With the Weimar politicians unable to solve Germany's problems, the people began to look elsewhere for a solution. The Depression



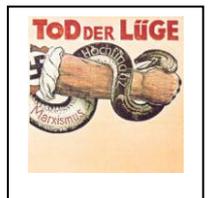
had hurt the German people and literally millions of unemployed people stood around on street corners with nothing to do and no hope of a job.



German unemployment figures 1921 -1932

Without work and money, discontent in Germany grew quickly. Some voted for the Communist party, but most people began to vote for the Nazis. Why was this?

- People did not trust the Weimar politicians; they did not think they were capable of helping Germany.
- Most Germans were afraid of Communism. Communists wanted to share wealth evenly between all people. Most Germans stood to lose out if the communist took control, with only the extremely poor benefitting. The Nazis said they would crush Communism.
- Rich businessmen like the weapons maker Krupp, hated the idea of communism and supported the Nazis, giving them lots of money to help them win elections.
- Joseph Goebbels was one of Hitler's closet advisers. He was a master of **propaganda**. He got the Nazi message across to people in a clever and appealing way.
- Hitler's message was simple. He blamed the Weimar politicians for the Depression, he blamed them for signing the Treaty of Versailles and he called them the '**November Criminals**' for the defeat of WWI on 11/11/1918.
- He offered people hope under his leadership. Stating the Nazis would provide jobs, turn profits and make Germany strong again.

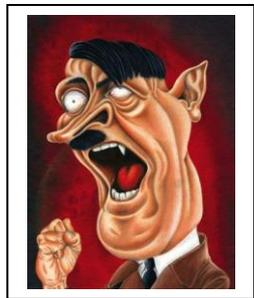


A propaganda poster depicts Hitler bringing down unemployment figures.





- He also instructed his brownshirts (the SA) to beat up his opponents and disrupt their meetings. By 1932 there were nearly 400,000 men in the SA almost 4 times bigger than the German army. Hitler was their leader (Führer) and looked like the strong man Germany needed.
- In March 1932 Hitler stood for election as President. Although he lost out to Hindenburg he gained 13 million votes. Hindenburg got 19 million and the communist candidate got 4 million. Hitler was clearly the rising star in Germany.



Although his message was simple it was clever, Hitler managed to offer something to all sections of German society. From the poor classes through to the middle and upper classes and also to the big industrialists - everyone would be better off under the Nazis.

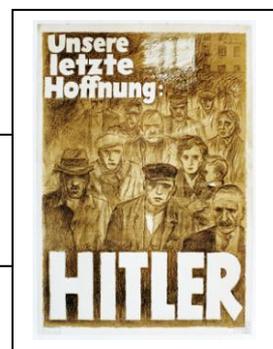
The Nazi Propaganda Machine

Goebbels was undoubtedly a master of propaganda and manipulation. In trying to get elected and also whilst in power the Nazis use of propaganda was extremely clever and appealing. Millions of Germans bought into it and supported Hitler as a result.

- ✓ They used films and records of Hitler speaking. (Tarantino's film *Inglorious B****s* highlights Nazi propaganda films).
- ✓ They used the Radio to carry the message of the Nazis into the homes of the German people. Remember the radio was a new phenomenon, TV's had not been invented.
- ✓ They put up millions of posters and flags of Hitler and the swastika.



Nazi propaganda poster -
'Hitler, our last hope.'





- ✓ They held mass meetings and rallies where Hitler spoke, and huge parades were carried out where the SA marched, music played and flags were waved.
- ✓ Hitler's intense influential speeches stirred up great excitement. People got carried away when he spoke and believed what he said.



Nazi Consolidation of Power

Between 1933 and 1934 Hitler turned Germany into a **dictatorship** - rule by one man. By the end of August 1934 he had created a **totalitarian regime**. A regime which ensures all of its citizens live the way the regime intends. For twelve years Hitler and the Nazi party ruled Germany in a period known as the **Third Reich**. How did Hitler achieve this?



The Reichstag Fire, 27th February 1933

Although Hitler had been made Chancellor in 1933, he still had very limited power. He persuaded Hindenburg to dissolve parliament and call another election set for March. Hitler was certain his party would win more seats and he could then pass the laws required to make him stronger.



Hitler started his election campaign with the Nazi propaganda machine in full swing and the SA took to the streets to intimidate any left-wing groups that opposed the Nazis.

Then on 27th February 1933, the **Reichstag building** went up in flames. A young Dutch communist called **Marinus van der Lubbe** was caught and arrested for starting the fire. He denied he started the fire and he also denied any links to the communist party, but Hitler was quick to blame the German Communists and said it was evidence that they were planning a revolution.





Many historians believe that the Nazis started the fire in order to discredit the communists before the election and declare an emergency. Whatever the truth, Hitler seized upon the opportunity to persuade Hindenburg to pass a law, using Article 48, giving Hitler special powers to protect the country.



Hitler's, **Decree for the Protection of the People and the State**, restricted free speech and the right to assemble (gather in groups), it also limited the freedom of the press and allowed imprisonment without trial.

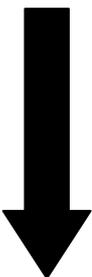
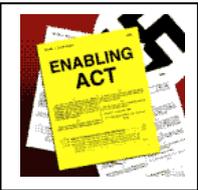
Using this law Hitler was able to round up his opposition and enemies and imprison them, namely communists and socialists. Furthermore, the press could not report what they wanted so the Nazi propaganda press told the German people what they wanted them to hear. Here began the **suppression of civil liberties** under the Nazis.

The Enabling Act, 23rd March 1933

The election of March took place in an atmosphere of intimidation and propaganda. The SA arrested political opponents and watched each Reichstag member go into the voting chamber. However, the Nazis still failed to gain the majority share of the vote they needed to pass laws alone.



Hitler proposed a new law, **The Enabling Act**. To become law Hitler needed to secure two-thirds of the vote in the Reichstag. He worked it out and saw that if he prevented the Communists from voting and agreed to support the Centre Party defend the interests of the Catholic Church he could secure his majority.



April 1933 - A law removes Jews and political opponents from civil service

May 1933 - Trade unions banned, strikes illegal

July 1933 - Law against Formation of parties

Oct 1933 - Censorship of Press

March 1933, Reichstag election results.

Party	No. of seats
The Nazi Party	288
Social Democrats	120
The Communist Party	81
The Centre Party	73
Others	85

As SA men stood outside the Krull Opera house preventing left-wing representatives from taking part in the vote, inside Hitler won 444 to 94. The Enabling Act was passed.

The Enabling Act made it possible for the government to pass laws without asking the Reichstag. Hitler could now pass whatever laws he wanted. In July 1933, Hitler passed the **Law against the New Formation of Parties**. Germany had now officially become a one-party state - and all through the use of the Constitution.

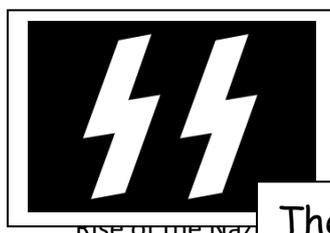
The Night of the Long Knives, 30th June 1934

By 1934 rumours were circulating amongst leading Nazis, that Ernst Rohm wanted his SA to take control of the German Army. If this was true and Rohm was successful then that would make him powerful enough to rival even Hitler.

Hitler now had to make a choice between Rohm and the SA and the army - he chose the army.

He asked his secret protection squad; the **SS**, to carry out a **purge** (clear out) of the SA leaders and other powerful opposition. On the night of 30th June 1934 400 'enemies of the state' were shot by the SS. Included amongst those killed was SA leader Ernst Rohm. The infamous event became known as **The Night of the Long Knives**.

Not only had the last remaining challengers to Hitler's supreme control been eliminated, but he now controlled the SA and had the support of the German Army.



The SS insignia

The members of the SA are no longer a threat to Hitler they will fade away through a combination of fear and lack of leadership

The Night of the Long Knives was carried out on the orders of Hitler

The army have now been won over by the Nazis, making Hitler's bid to be the next President easier

Hundreds of the leaders of the SA (including Ernst Rohm) were killed by the SS. They were killed because Hitler feared Rohm was a threat to his leadership, and to gain the support of the Army who feared that the SA may take over the Army

Hitler with President Hindenburg



Now, what about that Presidency?

On 2nd August 1934, President Hindenburg died. Hitler now seized the opportunity to combine the two posts of Chancellor and President and give himself the new title of **Fuhrer**.

He was now head of the state and commander of the army. The officers in the German army were made to swear an oath of loyalty to the Fuhrer.

Hitler was now absolute **dictator** of Germany. Nevertheless, to make his power appeal legal he asked the German people to vote on his actions - the Nazi propaganda machine made sure that Hitler returned a 90% vote in his favour.

Hitler's consolidation of Nazi power was complete. The Weimar Republic, discredited and demolished, was no more. Hitler had exploited the weaknesses of the Republic and had made himself supreme dictator of Germany.

