# 4 GERMANY – HITLER

## The global context

Authoritarian states – states in which the ruling regime is not accountable to the people and in which political pluralism and civil rights are restricted or simply abolished – take a variety of forms. In the case of Germany this was a totalitarian state, in which one party, driven by ideology, sought to exert control over every aspect of the life of its citizens and exercised a monopoly of power.

The emergence of an authoritarian state in the form of an ideologically driven totalitarian movement was not unique to Germany. The First World War acted as a catalyst for change in every nation that participated, whether on the side of the victors or the vanquished. The new authoritarian regimes of the first half of the 20th century (in Russia, Italy, and Germany) were given their opportunity because of the massive economic, social, and political disruption caused by the conflict and disillusionment produced by the terms of peace. The destruction of older state systems led to the emergence of regimes that, through repressive measures, attempted to wield complete control over every aspect of the life of a nation.

Italian fascism served as a model for Hitler in the early years of his movement. The factors explaining the rise of fascism in Italy (1919–1925) show similarities with those that helped promote the growth of National Socialism in Germany. Germany's case (1919–1934) illustrates how a totalitarian regime emerged after a brief period of democratic government following the First World War.

### Timeline

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The "November Revolution" and declaration of a republic | 1918 | |
| | 1919 | A convention held in Weimar to produce a constitution for the new democratic republic |
| Early problems and threats to the Weimar Republic, political and economic | 1919–1923 | |
| | 1923– 1929 | Weimar's "Golden Era/Gilded era" of growth and stability under the chancellorship [three months] and then Foreign Ministry of Gustav Stresemann |
| Decline of accountable democratic government and rule by presidential decree | 1930 | |
| | 1933 | Death of the Weimar Republic and the rise and establishment of National Socialism; Hitler becomes chancellor |
| *Gleichschaltung* and the establishment of the Führer state was largely accomplished | 1934 | |

# 4.1 The emergence of the authoritarian state in Germany, 1919–1934

## Conceptual understanding

### Key questions

- Was democracy desperately desired in Germany in 1918, or was its implementation part of a scheme by Germany's wartime leaders (Field Marshals Hindenburg and Ludendorff) to avoid a punitive settlement after Germany's surrender?
- Was the constitution established in 1919 a hindrance to successful democratic practice?
- What role did economic distress play in polarizing and brutalizing German political life during the period? How valid is AJP Taylor's view that "only the Great Depression put the wind into the sails of National Socialism"?
- What elements in Germany after 1918 were either actively hostile or simply apathetic towards the new system?
- Was the rise to power of a party committed to a totalitarian system a story of the "irresistible rise" of National Socialism?

### Key concepts

- Change
- Causes
- Consequences
- Significance

## Hitler's rise to power

The Weimar democratic system, established in Germany after the First World War, preceded the establishment of the single-party National Socialist state, which was effectively consolidated in 1934 when Adolf Hitler became Führer of Germany. National Socialism gained the support of the military, which eliminated domestically the last major obstacle to Hitler's ambition to establish his "Thousand Year (Third) Reich".

In explaining the emergence of the "Hitler state", it was common to describe the Weimar Republic "as a troubled interlude between two eras of greater and more sinister importance: the *Wilhelminian Kaiserreich*, which saw the consolidation of a unified Germany, and the Third Reich, which destroyed it". Weimar was seen as "a desperate and grudging experiment in democracy whose decisive failure had consequences not only for Germany but the world".

Such interpretations are linked to a pessimistic view of German history, in which the triumph of National Socialism is accepted as an inevitable and irresistible force welcomed by most Germans. However, at no point prior to the establishment of the one-party state in Germany did the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) achieve support from the majority of the electorate. The highest percentage of votes achieved in March 1933 was 43.9 per cent – impressive, but short of

an absolute majority. The Nazis achieved power not because most Germans actively desired it but because of a combination of circumstances, which calls into question the claim that the NSDAP "seized power", as Nazis later claimed. More recent interpretations emphasize the "*Stabübergabe*" – the "passing of the baton" or handover of power – by **vested interests** in Germany that tried to use the Nazis to counter the rise of the Communist Party (KPD) in the period 1932–1933.

Pessimists and catastrophists see the years 1919–1934 as little more than a prelude to Hitler's rise to power. The British historian AJP Taylor later claimed that "if there had been a strong democratic sentiment in Germany, Hitler would never have come to power ... (Germans) deserved what they got when they went round crying for a hero." Germanophobes willingly accepted a simplistic argument that the emergence and coming to power of National Socialism was the result of an inherent inability in the German character to appreciate and accept democratic principles. Such a view adds little to an understanding of the complexity of the period: the problems (internal and external) facing the democratic experiment and mistakes made by political parties and individuals that brought about Nazi success. As Ian Kershaw pointed out, "Hitler was no inexorable product of a German 'special path' (*Sonderweg*), no logical culmination of long-term trends in specifically German culture and ideology."


▲ The caption to this postcard from 1933 reads: "What the king conquered, the prince formed, the field marshal defended and the soldier saved and united."

## Conditions in which the authoritarian state emerged

1. A discredited parliamentary system that, due to instability and policy errors, produced a high level of disillusionment and frustration
2. The dislocation produced by the First World War of 1914–1918 and the subsequent Paris Peace Settlement, which produced **revisionism**, nationalism, and **revanchism**
3. Economic crises that produced social and economic conditions causing panic among the population, that is, political extremism resulting from economic instability
4. Fear of the Left, which was increased by the existence of the new Soviet state and the growth of socialist/communist movements in western Europe
5. The collaboration/capitulation of the existing political establishment or institutions – when **vested interests** underestimated the Fascists/Nazis in a tragedy of miscalculation
6. Semi-legal assumption of power, despite subsequent fascist/Nazi claims of a "seizure of power"

### Research and thinking skills

The figures shown on the postcard above are, from left to right, Frederick the Great of Prussia, Otto von Bismarck, Paul von Hindenburg, and Adolf Hitler.

1. With reference to the personalities shown on the postcard, what was the intended message of this card issued by the National?
2. Find out the meaning of the phrase "Janus-faced". In what way does the postcard illustrate this characteristic of National Socialism?

**revisionism**
The desire to alter the terms of what was perceived as the unjust treaty settlement after the First World War.

**revanchism**
The desire for revenge.

**vested interests**
Groups or individuals (such as political leaders, businessmen, and landowners) with an interest in resisting changes they felt would be to their disadvantage.

**pragmatism**
A willingness to be flexible and adapt to circumstances instead of sticking rigidly (dogmatically) to principles.

**millenarianism**
From "millennium"; literally a thousand years, and generally taken to mean the promise of a future period of prosperity under the regime.

### Left and Right

During this period "the Left" was a term commonly used to describe political parties that were left of centre, tending towards communist/socialist beliefs. By contrast, parties such as the German Nationalists (DNVP) and the NSDAP were referred to as the Right and Extreme Right respectively. While the IB does not use the terms in exam questions, many textbooks do use these terms to describe political stances, in the inter-war period especially.

**Spartacists**
A group of radical socialists, led by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, who made a futile attempt in January 1919 to establish a Bolshevik-type state in Germany.

### ATL Research skills

Look back over the factors that promoted fascism/National Socialism, noted above, and find specific details of the rise of Mussolini's fascism in the period 1919–1926.

Compare the relative significance of the factors promoting the growth of the two extremist movements. Alternatively, compare and contrast the factors behind the emergence of the Bolshevik state in Russia, 1917–1924.

7 The appeal of the movements/leaders and the skills of these leaders, in terms of:

- **pragmatism**
- **millenarianism** (also referred to as "chiliastic" programmes/promises)
- propaganda
- paramilitary forces and the use of violence to control the streets and destroy opponents.

The emergence of the Nazi regime cannot be reduced to one simple cause: the rise of authoritarian regimes is the result of circumstances leading to popular disillusionment with a preceding governmental system. In Germany this disillusionment led to popular demand for change in uncertain times, and to the unwillingness of the population to defend the preceding regime from overthrow by extremist groups.

## The Weimar Republic, 1918–1933/34

In Germany the "November Revolution" of 1918 occurred on 9 November, although Kaiser Wilhelm II, by then in exile in Holland, did not officially abdicate until 28 November. The declaration of a republic by Philip Scheidemann, an SPD (Social Democratic Party) leader, was followed two days later by the signing of an armistice with the Allied powers.

The removal of the dynasty and the German defeat produced a vacuum in political life that extremists sought to exploit. Only in January 1919 – following an unsuccessful revolt in Berlin led by the **Spartacists** – was a convention elected to produce a constitution for the new democratic republic. The holding of the convention in Weimar (at a safe distance from troubled Berlin) gave the republic its name and a constitution designed to replace autocratic and dynastic rule with one based on popular sovereignty.

Below is an overview of the six stages in the life of the short-lived democratic republic, linked to the question of why it failed and was replaced by the National Socialist state. Weimar's existence was plagued by domestic and external problems that allowed outright enemies of democratic principles – and those who had never provided more than lip service to such principles – to subvert the republic.

### Stage 1: 1918–1919

German military leaders later claimed that Germany's defeat in 1918 was a result of a "stab in the back" by internal enemies. While it was true that no Allied armies occupied German soil at the time of the armistice, both Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the military leaders of Germany, realized that defeat loomed. Weakened by blockade, by its own allies' collapse, by the superior resources of a reinvigorated Allied enemy after the USA entered the war in April 1917, and by worrying incidents of the breakdown of military discipline in Germany itself, surrender was necessary by late 1918.

The peace settlement that followed was likely to prove punitive (given the severity of Germany's treatment of Russia at Brest–Litovsk in March 1918 and the desire for revenge against the Central Powers generally, and Berlin specifically). The military leaders' acceptance of both Wilhelm II's

abdication and a democratic form of government could thus be seen as a means of trying to reduce the damage that might be inflicted on Germany in the treaty to come. It was hoped that Germany, as a "democratic state", would avoid the wrath of the victorious Allies or, if not, that blame for any punitive or "Carthaginian" peace would fall on the new democratic system rather than the High Command. It has been claimed that Hindenburg and Ludendorff's "last great manoeuvre on the battlefield" was an attempt to soften punishment rather than a commitment to democratic principles, then or for the future. In this sense the radical change that occurred in German political life was essentially a "revolution from above" rather than the result of popular groundswell.

Peter Gay wrote:

> *Germans had little practice in politics… When the democratic Weimar constitution opened the door to real politics, the Germans stood at the door, gaping, like peasants bidden to a palace.*

Commentators have seen the lack of familiarity with the practice of democracy as a factor inhibiting the success of the Weimar system. Hugo Preuss, a principal author of the new constitution, was aware early on of the need for the rapid adoption of a new attitude to a system that came unexpectedly for most Germans, stating:

> *One finds suspicions everywhere. Germans cannot shake off their old political timidity and their deference to the authoritarian state. They do not understand that the new government must be blood of their blood, flesh of their flesh.*

The lack of a "revolution from below" contrasted significantly with that of the older western European democracies such as Britain or France, where democracy was the outcome of popular pressures over a long period to end authoritarian systems represented by absolute monarchy. The democratic era in 20th-century German history was ushered in by the same individuals and interests that were later to preside over its decline and dissolution. While this did not necessarily mean that the system was doomed to failure, it provided a fragile base for development, especially combined with the fact the democratic government became linked, in the eyes of many, to the betrayal, defeat, and national humiliation of Versailles in 1919.

The Versailles Treaty (or "Diktat") produced bitterness because of the perceived injustice of the punishments inflicted upon Germany. Article 231 – the "War Guilt Clause" – was deeply resented and referred to as the *Kriegsschuldlüge* (the War Guilt Lie). Article 231 paved the way for the Allies to strip Germany of territory in Europe, of its colonial empire and military capacity, and to enforce the payment of reparations for war damages.

While Germany felt itself the victim of a callous Allied peace settlement, the country still retained the potential for recovery – not only economically but also geopolitically, since it was now girdled to the east by new states of dubious economic and military strength and a weakened Soviet Union focused on domestic reconstruction and development. As the Austrian playwright Hans Weigel later wrote in relation to the impact of the Paris Peace Settlement on Austria-Hungary, "Germany lost an empire, we lost a world."

**ATL Research and thinking skills**

1. What "price", in economic and territorial terms, was Bolshevik Russia forced to pay in the Treaty of Brest–Litovsk in order to quit the war with Germany?
2. In what ways could this be considered a punitive peace?

At the time, relatively few Germans accepted that the "dictated peace" was anything but a national shame. Nationalists held the governmental system responsible for signing the armistice and the Versailles Treaty.

### Summary of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles

**Article 231**: The "War Guilt Clause" (or the "War Guilt Lie") by which Germany and its allies were held responsible for the war of 1914– 1918; Germany was named but not held solely responsible, as many students believe.

**Territorial provisions:**

- Germany lost 13 per cent of its European territory, 12 per cent of its population and all its colonies, which were distributed to other powers. This meant the loss of 16 per cent of coal production, 48 per cent of iron production, 15 per cent of agricultural production, and 10 per cent of manufacturing capacity. [Many of these assets had only been acquired by Prussia in the 19th century, in a series of wars during the unification of the nation.]
- Alsace-Lorraine was returned to France, Eupen and Malmedy to Belgium, and Posen and West Prussia to the new state of Poland; Danzig was to become an international city under the supervision of the League of Nations, and Memel was returned to Lithuania.
- Northern Schleswig became part of Denmark and Upper Silesia became part of Poland. The Saar was put under control of the League of Nations; a plebiscite was to be held in 1935 to determine its future.
- *Anschluss* (or union) with Austria was forbidden.

**Financial penalties:** Reparations of £6600 million sterling were to be paid in restitution for the "loss and damage" caused by the war.

**Military provisions:**

- Demilitarization of the Rhineland area and its left bank to be occupied by Allied forces for 15 years.
- Germany's army to be restricted to 100 000 men; no conscription, tanks or heavy artillery.
- Navy restricted to 15 000 men, no submarines and the fleet limited to six battleships, six cruisers and 12 destroyers.
- Germany not permitted to have an air force.

## Stage 2: 1919–1923

Even before the republican constitution was adopted in August 1919, the new government, under Friedrich Ebert (SPD), found itself faced with threats to its survival. On 10 November Ebert concluded a pact with Wilhelm Groener, Chief of Staff of the German military. In return for military support against enemies of the new Republic, Ebert agreed to allow the army to remain a virtual "imperium in imperio" ("state within a state"). Until 1934 – when it took an oath of allegiance to Hitler – the military, rather than being the servant of the people and its elected representatives, acted in its own interests. Military support proved *conditional* throughout the life of the Republic – the army chose when it would act in defence of the government, and when it would not. In the case of the Spartacist uprising of 1918–1919, the army was ready to suppress the "Bolsheviks" with alacrity, but at the time of the Kapp putsch in 1920 – a move by those on the opposite side of the political spectrum from the Spartacists – the military declined to act in defence of the state. With the statement "*Reichswehr* does not fire upon *Reichswehr*", the army made it clear that it would not act against forces it considered good German nationalists, many of whom were ex-soldiers. Only a socialist-inspired general strike ended the putsch.

Key provisions in the constitution are often blamed for the failure of Weimar democracy. Although Article 17 introduced universal and secret suffrage, it also the stated the principle of proportional representation, identified as a major weakness of the system. Proportional representation

meant that the plethora of political parties were often unable to form long-term stable governments, either on their own or in coalition. To blame the system is simplistic: no system could succeed without a willingness to work in the spirit of democracy. Some political parties of Weimar were either actively hostile or ambivalent towards democratic government, accepting it but often looking back fondly to the pre-Weimar Wilhelminian era.

Political parties committed to democracy included the Social Democrats (SPD), the Democratic Party (DDP), the German People's Party (DVP) and the Centre/Zentrum and its sister party, the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), although by the early 1930s the latter two began to veer towards support of movements with non-democratic programmes.

**The main political parties of the Weimar era**

| Party | Ideology |
|---|---|
| **KPD** (Communist Party) | Hostile to democracy, committed to a Soviet- (Moscow-)style regime and taking instructions from Moscow throughout most of the Weimar period<br>Paramilitary organization: Red Veterans' League |
| **SPD** (Social Democrats) | Often spouted Marxist rhetoric but essentially dedicated to socialism through the ballot box – that is, non-revolutionary socialists in comparison to the KPD<br>Paramilitary organization: Reichsbanner |
| **DDP** (Democratic Party) | Committed to the Weimar democratic system |
| **DVP** (German People's Party) | To the right of centre of the political spectrum but largely committed to a democratic system |
| **DNVP** (German National People's Party or Nationalists) | Well-funded party linked to "big business" and landowners. At best a reluctant supporter of Weimar and, as late as 1931, "committed to the renewal of the German empire as established under the Hohenzollerns", noting that the "monarchical form of government corresponds to the uniqueness and historical development of Germany"<br>Paramilitary organization: Stahlhelm |
| **NSDAP** (National Socialist German Workers' Party) | Hostile to democracy and favouring the establishment of a single-party state on the extreme right of the political spectrum, stressing ultra-nationalistic, militaristic and racist views<br>Paramilitary organization: Sturmabteilung (SA) |
| **Centre/Zentrum** and **BVP** (Bavarian People's Party) | Ambivalent towards Weimar. Initially a significant contributor to coalition government, along with the SPD and DDP. As the parties of "political Catholicism", by the early 1930s (and fearful of the rise of communism in Germany) willing to collaborate with parties and individuals not sympathetic to democracy |

Article 48 has also been identified as a constitutional weakness. It stated that the president was entitled to suspend basic principles of the constitution and rule by emergency decree "in the event that the public order and security are seriously disturbed or endangered". Given the turmoil in Germany in late 1918 and early 1919, this provision was a practical one if rapid action had to be taken to defend the democratic government. While it is accurate to claim that Germany after March 1930 was run by emergency decree, and in an increasingly authoritarian manner, was it the fault of the constitution or the misuse (or abuse) of the constitutional provision by individuals or interests acting according to their own agenda?

The constitution was a construct of principles adopted from existing systems in Western states and one of the most progressive documents of its time. Did it fail, or was it failed, because groups deliberately undermined it and used the very freedoms permitted to destroy accountable government?

Weimar laboured from the beginning under economic and political burdens not of its own making: the defeat in war, the signing of an ignominious peace treaty, reparations, apathy from those steeped in nostalgia for the pre-1914 authoritarian structure, and political extremism and putschism. As Gay noted:

> *... from the beginning (of the Republic) there were many who saw its travail with superb indifference or with that unholy delight in the suffering of others for which the Germans have coined that evocative term Schadenfreude.*

One thing that totalitarian regimes did focus on, when consolidating power in the USSR and in Nazi Germany, was the need to ensure that basic governmental structures and apparatus were purged of elements disloyal or potentially opposed to the new system. Weimar, due to its hasty establishment, inherited many administrators, bureaucrats, judges, and army officers from the time of the Kaiser. The Wilhelminian structure was thus basically left intact after 1918–1919 and the democratic system was left to work with people who were, at best, "reluctant Republicans" (***Vernunftrepublikaner***) and, at worst, downright obstructionist and defiant. Neither Lenin nor Hitler made that mistake when they established their single-party regimes. In both cases a rapid "cleansing" of the state apparatus resulted in a loyal machine to deliver and implement single-party policies.

***Vernunftrepublikaner***
Republicans not from conviction but from necessity – for example, because of the lack of practical alternatives at that time.

The polarization and brutalization of political life in the early stages of the Republic was witnessed not only in the Spartacist and Kapp threats but also by communist uprisings in Munich, the Ruhr, and Hamburg (1919–1923) and the attempt by Hitler to copy (unsuccessfully) Mussolini's "March on Rome" in November 1923.

## The economic crisis of 1923

The "currency delirium" that convulsed Germany by late November 1923 was the result of events initiated by the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr area, Germany's industrial heartland. France especially, infuriated by a default in reparations payments and determined to enforce the Versailles Treaty provisions, appeared determined to teach Germany a lesson – and possibly hold on to the area for the longer term to weaken any possibility of German recovery. The reactions to the occupation were passive resistance and non-cooperation by the workers of the Ruhr, along with government support for the workers in terms of wage payments, regardless of the fact that production had collapsed. By resorting to the printing press, inflation, which had been occurring since the end of the war, accelerated to levels that destroyed confidence in Germany's currency and also in Weimar's ability to defend the territorial and economic interests of the nation.

For the longer term, the inability of Weimar to cope with the crisis of 1923 helped undermine confidence in the system and contributed to anti-republicanism. This would provide the basis for the growth of support for authoritarian and totalitarian movements when a second economic crisis struck in 1929.

By November 1923 one US dollar was worth 4.2 trillion German marks. For many, savings accumulated over years were wiped out. Those on fixed incomes or pensions were ruined and a barter economy emerged.

While there were beneficiaries (those with access to foreign currency and those with outstanding loans that could be paid off easily, for example, the German industrialist Hugo Stinnes), for most citizens the experience was one of misery. The government of Chancellor Cuno resigned in August 1923, to be replaced by a new coalition of the DDP, SPD, Zentrum and DVP under Gustav Stresemann. Under Stresemann, recovery from the economic disaster, aided by the USA in the shape of the **Dawes Plan** of 1924, ushered in a period known as the Golden Era (1924–1929).

But before the recovery, extremists in Hamburg (Communist Party of Germany or KPD) and in Munich (Nazi Party or NSDAP) had seized the opportunity to exploit the situation by staging unsuccessful uprisings against the government. In the case of the National Socialists, Hitler's "Beerhall Putsch" (also known as the November, or Munich, Putsch) proved an inglorious failure, although the subsequent trial and sentencing allowed the Nazis to articulate their ideology nationally for the first time. In *Mein Kampf*, written during his brief period of imprisonment, Hitler stated:

> *All great movements are popular sentiments, volcanic eruptions of human passions and emotional sentiments, stirred either by the cruel Goddess of Distress or by the firebrand of the world hurled amongst the masses…*

This climate of economic and social distress encouraged his gamble to seize power, but the fact that it took him another decade or more to gain power suggests that such distress did abate, at least temporarily. If, as Frank McDonough claimed, Hitler's "utopian dream could only have prospered in the dark of a very black night", the achievements of the Golden Era of Weimar from 1924–1929 deprived extremism of the opportunity to flourish. Only by 1929 was recovery of National Socialist fortunes made possible with the onset of the Great Depression. The rise of Hitler provides a classic example of the generally accepted view that political extremism arises out of economic misery.

**Dawes Plan (1924)**
This measure (undertaken by the US to prop up the German and thus the European economies, which had also suffered from Germany's collapse) allowed Germany to make economic improvements as well as reducing their annual reparations payments that had precipitated their default and the 1923 occupation of the Ruhr. The aid ensured that America's export-driven economy would benefit – and prevented the growth of communism in Germany. A new currency (the Rentenmark) replaced the worthless mark in November 1923 and the American loans helped restore confidence in this new currency, renamed the Reichsmark in 1924.

## The NSDAP's 25-point programme

The NSDAP was officially founded in 1920, a renamed version of Anton Drexler's German Workers' Party (DAP) established in Munich in 1919. Originally tasked by military intelligence to attend and report upon the activities of such groups, Hitler joined the party, helping in the drafting of a 25-point programme, and became leader of the NSDAP in 1921.

The programme contained a mixture of points that could be pitched to a wide audience. Mussolini claimed, in relation to Italian fascism, that, "We play the lyre on all its strings" – setting out a range of offerings designed to appeal to as many as possible. The NSDAP, by its very change of name from the original DAP, suggests a similar approach to targeting the population.

If the intention of such a programme was to ensure mass support, it failed in the short term. Policies in the programme that were aimed at various constituencies in Germany – whether aggrieved nationalists, the industrial working class, farmers, and small proprietors/businessmen, for example – were already on offer by other parties. Attempts to wean the population from existing party allegiances proved unsuccessful until the economic crisis of 1929 onwards.

### Thinking skills

Find the specific points of the 25-point programme at: avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/nsdappro.asp

Given the circumstances in Germany in the early post-war years, and with reference to the 25 points, answer the following:

1. Identify and explain what groups or individuals (for example, social/economic/professional) might be attracted by specific points of the programme and which might not.
2. To what extent was the programme "nationalist" and "socialist" in its offerings?
3. Which elements of the programme suggested strong authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies?

Lack of support for National Socialism was illustrated by the abortive putsch in November 1923. The treason trial of the putschists that followed provided Hitler not only with the opportunity to justify his actions to a national audience but also reinforced the extent to which the judicial system was unsympathetic to the democratic principles it was constitutionally bound to uphold. Hitler and Ludendorff (one of the military leaders who presided over the establishment of Weimar) were dealt with leniently. Ludendorff was acquitted and Hitler received a five-year sentence, of which he served only nine months in Landsberg prison.

The lack of sympathy for the Republic exhibited by important elements of the state apparatus underlined the fact that Weimar remained, for many, both unwelcome and unloved.

| Approximate % of vote for political parties | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Party | May 1924 | December 1924 | 1928 |
| KPD | 12 | 9 | 11 |
| SPD | 21 | 26 | 30 |
| DDP | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Zentrum/BVP | 17 | 18 | 15 |
| DVP | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| DNVP | 19 | 21 | 14 |
| NSDAP | 7 | 3 | 2 |
| Others* | 9 | 7 | 14 |

*"Others" refers to parties often based on individual states or regional interests or the Independent Socialists (USPD), who had been a significant force before 1924 but which had split by 1922, with most members finding new homes within the KPD or SPD

## Stage 3: the Golden Age, 1924–1929

The years of Gustav Stresemann's leadership, first as chancellor for three months in 1923 and then as Foreign Minister till his death in October 1929, ushered in a period of remarkable recovery in terms of economic growth after the crisis of hyperinflation and a period of political stability that contrasted greatly with the violence of the earlier years.

Faith in the system under Stresemann was reflected in the voting patterns in the three Reichstag elections of 1924–1928, to the left. Parties actively hostile to the Republic over the period made little progress (the KPD) or lost heavily in terms of electoral support (the NSDAP). Conversely, the SPD, which was committed to the parliamentary system, made significant gains. While this does not prove that attitudes to the Republic had undergone a profound change among German voters as a whole, it did appear to offer hope that the challenges to Weimar were over. Just as political extremism thrived in conditions of social and economic suffering, the Stresemann era, during which a raft of economic and foreign policy measures were enacted, helped remove the reservoir of misery from which opponents of democracy drew their inspiration and support.

The image of Germany during these years was of a nation recovering not only from the ravages of war but also one enjoying a respite from its problems. Forces hostile to democracy were either in retreat or quiescent. Yet the period was also one where less attractive developments were obvious, and these threw into question how solid the achievements of the period were.

## The achievements of the Stresemann era

- Resolution of the Ruhr problem (the basis of hyperinflation)

  Germany committed itself to making future reparations payments. This promise, backed in combination with the loans made to Germany by the USA, allowed French and Belgian forces to withdraw from the occupied Ruhr area and the resumption of production of Germany's industrial heartland.
- Restoration of Germany's finances with US aid under the Dawes Plan of 1924
- Suppression of physical threats from extremist movements in Hamburg and Munich in October and November 1923
- Reconciliation with France in the Locarno Pact of 1925

  In this pact, Germany stated its acceptance of its western borders. All parties (France, Germany, and Belgium) renounced the use of force, with Britain and Italy acting as guarantors of the pact. Significantly, eastern frontiers did not form part of the agreements of the pact.
- Recognition of Germany's new status by the Great Powers

  Germany, originally excluded from the League of Nations, was admitted in 1926. It now appeared as if the nation was being welcomed back into the European family of Great Powers with its Council member position.
- The **Kellogg-Briand Pact** of 1928

  Signatory states renounced the use of force in the settlement of international disputes. Stresemann's signing on Germany's behalf helped to convince states that Germany was committed to peace and to establish a possible basis for diplomatic revision of the Versailles Treaty.

## The failures of the Stresemann era

- The outcome of the trial of the putschists in November 1923

  This reinforced the fact that enemies of the Republic were treated leniently, as long as they were of the nationalist persuasion. This continued the earlier trend of treating the perpetrators of political assassinations differently according to their political affiliation. Left-wing murderers on average served a 15-year sentence; right-wing murderers served four months. No right-wing murderer was given the death sentence (out of 354 committed); 10 left-wing murderers were executed (out of 22 committed).
- The outcome of elections for a successor to President Ebert after his death in February 1925

  In April, the 78-year-old Hindenburg was elected. Kolb noted that this "began … a silent change in the constitution, whereby – gradually and at first barely perceptibly – the balance shifted in favour of presidential power". Hindenburg, claimed Gay, "smelled of the old order; he had been sold to the public in a demagogic campaign as the great man above parties". As Stresemann himself noted in 1925, "The truth is, the Germans do not want a president in a top hat … He has to wear a uniform and a chestful of medals".
- The end of accountable government, 1930

  Under Hindenburg, accountable government was replaced, by March 1930, with a process of rule through Article 48 and a series of presidential cabinets, culminating with the appointment of Hitler as chancellor in January 1933.
- Germany's reliance on US loans, which made it vulnerable to problems should they be withdrawn

  Nationalist groups saw the Young Plan (proposed in 1929, just before the death of Stresemann and the Wall Street Crash) to reduce the reparation payments set by the Dawes Plan of 1924 and extend the period of repayment as a sign of the Republic's continued weakness. It was seen as pandering to the Allied powers and the Versailles Diktat.
- Coalition governments

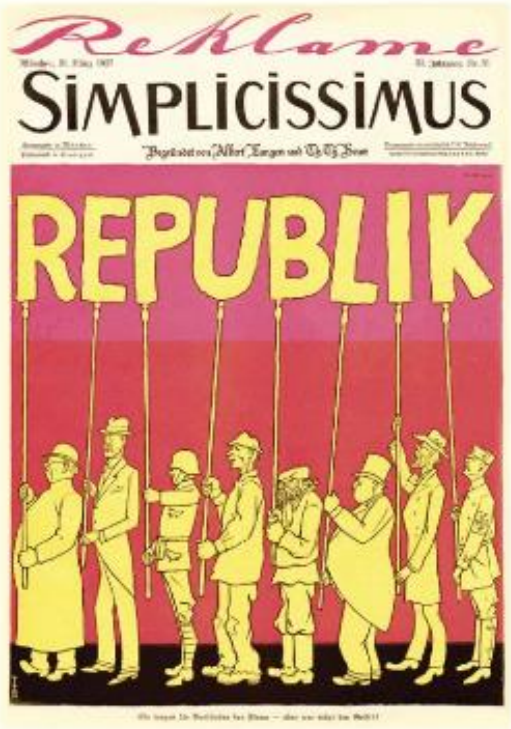
  Continuing coalition governments were unlikely to provide a firm foundation to deal effectively with major economic or political problems.
- Agrarian distress

  Farmers' debts accumulated as a result of decreasing food prices, leading to agrarian distress even before the depression of 1929.
- Low industrial production

  While improving, this was still behind other developed European states. Unemployment figures hovered around the million mark even before the crisis of 1929.

- The reorganization of NSDAP

  While extremist parties made little electoral progress throughout the period, the NSDAP worked to reorganize itself as a national movement. The establishment of a strong leadership principle (*Führerprinzip*) under Hitler, the appointment of Gauleiters (local area leaders subordinate to Hitler), the promotion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* (the concept of the People's Community based on blood rather than class), the establishment of youth and professional associations with party links (for example, associations for German physicians, teachers, jurists, craftsmen, and small traders) and the use of propaganda aimed at exploiting the grievances of those in distress allowed the Nazis to exploit the crisis of 1929 onwards and garner support.




▲ *Simplicissimus*, 21 March 1927: the caption at the bottom reads, "They carry the initials of the institution, but who exhibits the spirit?"

The movement's decision to reject any more putsch attempts and pursue a parliamentary road to power was stated by Hitler when he pronounced, "If outvoting them takes longer than outshooting them, at least the result will be guaranteed by their own constitution." This period of preparation proved vital for Nazi success in the aftermath of Wall Street's collapse, as did the appointment of Alfred Hugenberg as leader of the German National People's Party (DNVP) in 1928. Hugenberg, "among the crowd of self-appointed grave-diggers to the Republic", had "made overtures to Hitler, still the pariah of German politics". Even before the Depression, the move towards authoritarian and anti-democratic government increased its pace. Hitler, the rebel, was able to cloak himself in the respectability that Hugenberg's support would provide.

## Stage 4: decline (1930–1933)

The "Golden Years" of the Stresemann era might more accurately be described as "Gilded Years". Foreign aid from the USA, which did so much in the "Golden Years" to rescue the economy, proved a double-edged sword. When America's economy collapsed, the fragile nature of Weimar's economic structure was revealed – along with the abandonment of any glimmers of growing faith in the Weimar system.

On 3 October 1929, Stresemann, "the political cement which bound together the coalition ministries of those years", died. Later that month, the stock market on Wall Street collapsed. The impact on Germany was huge: the country plunged rapidly into depression, as short-term credits from the US were recalled. Unemployment figures (high even before the crisis) soared, from 1.3 million in September 1929 to more than 3 million in September 1930, peaking at just over 6 million – a third of all German workers – by early 1933.

### The growth in support for extremism

The economic and psychological impacts of the Great Depression were not unique to Germany but it was in Germany that the political system buckled under pressure. Anti-republican elements mobilized against the parliamentary system, which appeared unable to deal with the catastrophe that enveloped the nation.

Not only did frustration with the Republic produce a move to extremes in voting returns (1930–1933) but, as Kolb pointed out, it became "the primary object of the industrial leaders (after 1929–30) to deprive

the Reichstag of power and establish an authoritarian system of government", which would allow them to wage "a ruthless fight against parliamentarianism and the 'party state', social democracy and the trade unions." The actions of these vested interests and the growth in support for extremist parties were aided by the implementation of rule by presidential decree after March 1930, when the last truly accountable government of Weimar collapsed over the issue of unemployment insurance payments.

From then on, Weimar experienced a shift of power from the elected representatives of the people to "presidential cabinets", in which decision-making was in the hands of a select few, an increasingly senile President Hindenburg was entrusted with the power to rule in the interests of the constitution during the period of distress. In practice, his appointment of chancellors was determined by a circle of interests surrounding him with a common outlook unsympathetic to democratic government.

The day after the collapse of the Müller cabinet (27 March 1930), Hindenburg appointed Heinrich Brüning, who became known as the "Hunger Chancellor" because of his deflationary economic policies which, with their emphasis on increased taxation and reduced welfare benefits, antagonized the parties of the Left and provided fuel for Nazi propaganda in the period of economic distress that followed. Election results for the Reichstag in September 1930 revealed the growth of support for extremist parties in these new circumstances of misery.

Brüning governed until May 1932 with the aid of emergency decrees issued by Hindenburg. He was dismissed when Hindenburg, under advice from those surrounding him and worried by Brüning's plan to implement agrarian changes that would adversely affect the large landowners, brought in Franz von Papen as the new chancellor. Von Papen's cabinet was referred to as the "Barons' Cabinet" (the *Almanach de Gotha* Cabinet – a reference to the directory of European royalty and higher nobility) because of the preponderance of aristocrats it contained. The failure of von Papen's cabinet to deal with the economic and political unrest was responsible for continued electoral gains for extreme parties in the Reichstag elections of July 1932.

New elections in November 1932 witnessed a decline in votes for extremism of the Right, but a growth of electoral support for the KPD. Von Papen resigned, to be replaced by von Schleicher, who himself resigned in January 1933. It was on von Papen's advice to Hindenburg – along with the urging of pro-Nazis such as Hindenburg's secretary Otto Meissner and the president's son Oskar – that Hitler was offered the position of chancellor (of a coalition cabinet) on 30 January, at a point when the elections of the previous November had revealed declining popular support for the NSDAP.

As Bracher commented:

> *Hitler made his way into the government… through the authoritarian gap in the Weimar constitution (i.e. the misuse of Article 48), and immediately set about destroying the constitution he had taken an oath to defend.*

Von Papen's belief that Hitler could be controlled proved false. As early as 1928, Goebbels, in relation to Weimar parliamentary government, had written in the Nazi newspaper *Der Angriff*, "We come as enemies; as the wolf bursts into the flock, so we come."

**ATL Research and thinking skills**

1. Find out what type of publication *Simplicissimus* was – its origins and political outlook before and after 1933.
2. Bearing in mind the date of the above front-page illustration and that economic recovery was under way, what point was being made about support for Weimar?

While it was not yet obvious in January 1933, with hindsight Peter Gay claimed that, with Hitler's appointment, "The Republic was dead in all but name, the victim of structural flaws, reluctant defenders, unscrupulous aristocrats and industrialists, a historic legacy of authoritarianism, a disastrous world situation and deliberate murder."

Weimar foundered, not because of any major change in Nazi policy (which remained remarkably consistent) but because of:

- the collaboration of elites that sought to use Hitler against a perceived greater threat (communism)
- the failure of parties on the Left to combine in the interests of self-preservation against an ideological enemy
- the reorganization of the Nazi movement in its expansion from a South German regional organization to a national one by 1929, which allowed it to exploit opportunities with the onset of the depression
- the propaganda campaign waged by the Nazis to promote National Socialism and portray Hitler as the saviour of Germany in its time of trouble.

## Source skills

Below are a series of sources, primary and secondary, focusing on the last years of democracy and Hitler's coming to office.

### Source A

**Reichstag election results: September 1930–November 1932 (showing number of deputies and % of national vote)**

| Party | September 1930 | July 1932 | November 1932 |
|---|---|---|---|
| KPD | 77 (13.1%) | 89 (14.3%) | 100 (16.9%) |
| SPD | 143 (24.5%) | 133 (21.6%) | 121 (20.4%) |
| DDP (known as Deutsche Staatspartei after 1930) | 20 (3.8%) | 4 (1.0%) | 2 (1%) |
| Zentrum/BVP | 87 (14.8%) | 97(15.7%) | 90 (15%) |
| DVP | 30 (4.5%) | 7 (1.2%) | 11 (1.9%) |
| DNVP | 41 (7%) | 37 (5.9%) | 52 (8.3%) |
| NSDAP | 107 (18.3%) | 230 (37.3%) | 196 (33.1%) |

NB: 'Other parties' have not been included as they make up only a very small percentage of seats and percentages. For a more complete table see Eberhard Kolb's *The Weimar Republic* (Routledge, 2004).

### Source B

*Analysing the November and December 1932 election results, [the latter were communal elections held in Thuringia where the Nazi vote had dropped by 35 per cent], the liberal Vössische Zeitung saw grounds for hope: the 'nimbus of constant success has vanished, mass propaganda has lost its sensational appeal, the most superlative promises fall on deaf ears. The recovery of health can commence.' Optimism returned abroad, too. Harold Laski, the Left-wing British scholar-seer of the London School of Economics, thought that Nazism was a spent force. Exhibiting an unerring capacity to get the major issues hopelessly wrong, Laski predicted that Hitler was destined to spend the evening of his life in a Bavarian village, reminiscing in a beer garden about how he had nearly ruled the Reich.*

Burleigh, M. 2000. *The Third Reich: A New History*.

### Source C

Kurt Lüdecke, in his 1938 publication *I knew Hitler*, described the gloom that had descended on the NSDAP by December 1932, citing excerpts from the diary of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's propaganda chief, which indicated the despair within the party:

*December 6: The (Nazi) situation in the Reich is catastrophic.*

*December 8: Severe depression prevails… Financial worries render all systematic work impossible… The danger now exists of the whole Party's going to pieces… For hours on end the Führer walks anxiously up and down the hotel room… Once he stops and merely says:*

*"If the Party should ever break up, I'll make an end of things in three minutes with a revolver."*

*December 17: We decide to work with all our means on the Party organization… and see if we cannot lift the organization up again, in spite of all.*

*December 20: We must summon all our strength to rally the Party once more.*

*December 21: Altercation and discord… The financial crisis continues.*

*December 29: It is possible that in a few days the Führer will have a conference with Papen. There a new chance opens.*

Lüdecke joined the Nazi movement in 1922 and helped in the organization of the SA paramilitary force as well as being given responsibility for fundraising for the Party. He was a close friend of Ernst Röhm, the SA leader killed in the purge of the SA leadership in June 1934. Lüdecke survived the purge and was permitted to go into political exile in Switzerland where, in 1938, the book was produced.

### Source D

*The decisive factor (which substantially facilitated 30 January 1933) was the careless playing with further-reaching projects and the associated activity of the Papen-Hugenberg-Hindenburg group. Believing with ambitious self-assurance that it was taming and exploiting the totalitarian mass movement, this tiny minority in fact helped the National Socialist leadership into positions of power they had not been able to achieve of their own accord.*

Karl Dietrich Bracher. 1955. *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik.*

### Source E

*Hitler's broad-based totalitarian movement was not capable of toppling the Republic on its own, despite the fact that it had attained an astonishing level of political dynamism and had become the voice of a good one-third of Germans as the crisis deepened…. By the end of 1932 the NSDAP had plainly reached the limits of its electoral potential and was showing signs of falling back once again… After 1930 the presidential regimes destroyed what was left of the republican constitution and created a power vacuum which their own moves towards authoritarianism proved unable to fill… In 1933, finally the new governing elite consortium, in partnership with the National Socialist movement, released the destructive energies of the Third Reich. The German crisis had become the German catastrophe; its result was to be the devastation of Europe.*

Detlev Peukert 1991. *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity.*

### Source F

*Looked at politically, the result of the election is so fearful because it seems clear that the present election will be the last normal Reichstag election for a long time to come… The elected Reichstag is totally incapable of functioning, even if the Zentrum goes in with the National Socialists, which it will do without hesitation if it seems in the interests of the party. Genuine middle-class parties no longer exist.*

*The one consolation could be the recognition that the National Socialists have passed their peak… but against this stands the fact that the radicalism of the Right has unleashed a strong radicalism on the Left. The communists have made gains everywhere and thus internal political disturbances have become exceptionally bitter. If things are faced squarely and soberly the situation is such that more than half the German people have declared themselves against the present state, but have not said what sort of state they would accept. As the lesser of many evils to be feared, I think, would be the open assumption of dictatorship by the present government.*

Wilhelm Külz (DDP /Staatspartei), former Weimar Interior Minister and Mayor of Dresden, writing of the November 1932 Reichstag election.

### Source G

*In January 1933 the German upper classes imagined that they had taken Hitler prisoner. They were mistaken. They soon found that they were in the position of a factory owner who employs a gang of roughs to break up a strike; he deplores the violence, is sorry for his workpeople who are being beaten up, and intensely dislikes the bad manners of the gangster leader whom he has called in. All the same, he pays the price and discovers, soon enough, that if he does not pay the price (later, even if he does) he will be shot in the back. The gangster chief sits in the managing director's office, smokes his cigars, finally takes over the concern himself. Such was the experience of the owning classes in Germany after 1933.*

AJP Taylor. 1945. *The Course of German History.*

### Source H

*Hitler was the last chance, not the first choice or the preferred solution for the overwhelming majority of the traditional elites. Despite their anti-democratic consensus the elites themselves were too fragmented and too diverse in their alternative visions to be able to mount a deliberate conspiracy… In fact the willingness of the elites to embark upon the risk of 30 January 1933 represents the bankruptcy of their strategies and of the goal of an essentially traditional, typically reactionary "counter-revolution". The behaviour of the different power groups was characterized by an overestimation of their own strength and an underestimation of the modalities of the new mass politics.*

Ian Kershaw, *Der 30 Januar 1933: Ausweg aus der Krise und Anfang des Staatsverfalls.*

### Source I


▲ A-I-Z, 16 October 1932. The main caption reads, "The meaning of the Hitler salute", followed by "Millions stand behind me" and, at the bottom, "Little man asks for big gifts".

### Questions

1 How does the performance of the KPD (1930–1932) differ from that of the NSDAP according to source A?

2 Given that the economy was beginning to show signs of recovery by autumn 1932, why might businessmen and conservative politicians find the result of the November 1932 election worrying?

3 What could explain the relatively consistent performance of the Zentrum/BVP in this period of economic turmoil (1930–1932)?

4 With reference to sources B and C, explain why those hostile to National Socialism might believe that the danger of right-wing extremism had passed by late 1932.

5 What motive could von Papen have for approaching Adolf Hitler at this stage?

6 Explain the reference in source D to 30 January 1933.

7 According to Bracher, what was the aim of the Papen-Hugenberg-Hindenburg group in their dealings with the Nazi leadership?

8 What phrase does Bracher use to describe the misguided attitude of this "group" in their plans for "taming and exploiting the totalitarian mass movement"?

9 In what ways does Peukert's view of the strength of National Socialism by late 1932 echo those shown in sources B, C and D?

10 According to Peukert, when had democratic government in Germany ceased to exist effectively?

11 What is meant by the phrase "governing elite consortium", which Peukert claims entered a "partnership" with National Socialism in 1933?

12 According to Külz, what was the most revealing fact about the attitude of German voters towards the "present state" in Germany in November 1932?

13 For Külz, what welcome development had the November election produced and what dangers faced the Republic in November 1932?

14 What does the phrase "lesser of two evils" mean, and what did Külz see as a possible solution to continued political uncertainty?

15 According to sources G and H, where does the blame lie for the coming to power of National Socialism by 1933?

16 What impression is given in sources G and H of the motives of the "owning classes"/ "traditional elites" for their actions in late 1932 and early 1933?

17 With which political party was the *A-I-Z* (*Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung*) closely linked?

18 What was the purpose of this photomontage (source I) produced by John Heartfield in October 1932?

19 Who, or what, were the 'millions' to which Heartfield was referring?

20 What values and limitations does such a source have in explaining the rise of Hitler and the NSDAP at this time?

## Stage 5: from democracy to dictatorship (January–March 1933)

Whether National Socialist beliefs, wholly or in part, were attractive to a majority of Germans before or after 1933 is difficult to ascertain. Certainly there was never an absolute electoral majority for the Nazis even after the manipulation, bribery, and intimidation that marked the last election in Germany (March 1933) before Weimar was wound up.

When Hitler was appointed chancellor by Hindenburg (he was *not* elected by the majority of German voters), it was as chancellor of a mixed cabinet. Von Papen was appointed vice-chancellor and only three National Socialists were represented in the cabinet (Hitler, Goering, and Frick). While von Papen was reported as stating that "Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far into a corner that he'll squeak", the events of the following months illustrated how Hitler had been misjudged as he used his position as chancellor (and Goering's role as Minister of the Interior) to manoeuvre himself into the role of semi-legal dictator.

Hitler's appointment may have been largely due to intrigue or "political jobbery" on the part of the vested interests (or the traditional elite), but responsibility for the meteoric rise of Nazi fortunes was not attributable to economic turmoil and elite plots alone. The failure of the Left to unite in defence of the Republic (and in the interests of their own future security) and the skilful manipulation of circumstances by the Nazis (from January to March 1933) set the scene for a totalitarian state in Germany. While democracy might have been in a state of suspension since 1930, the developments of 1933 and 1934 led to its complete liquidation.

Inside the Left, the unwillingness of the SPD and KPD to recognize the danger of Hitler's movement allowed the Nazis to consolidate power. Relations between the SPD and KPD (both of which Hitler considered "Marxist") had become embittered as early as 1918/1919 with the crushing of the


▲ SPD election poster, 1932

communist-inspired Spartacus uprising by the SPD-led Weimar government of Friedrich Ebert. The SPD manifesto of January 1919 declared:

> *We refuse any longer to allow ourselves to be terrorized by lunatics and criminals. Order must be at long last established in Berlin and the tranquil erection of the new … Germany must be safeguarded.*

The crushing of the Spartacus uprising and the murder of its leaders led to accusations by the KPD that the SPD were traitors to the workers' movement and supporters of a bourgeois, capitalist democracy. In the following years, with Moscow's encouragement, the KPD openly vilified the SPD as "social fascists" – a party which distracted the working class from Marxist goals – that by default aided the growth of capitalism and what the KPD believed to be capitalism's hired thugs: the NSDAP.

In 1929, the Communist International (Comintern) railed against parties such as the SPD whose "principal function at the present time is to disrupt the essential militant unity of the proletariat … against capital". The programme maintained that "social democracy of all shades" had become "the last reserve of bourgeois society and its most reliable support". The hostility between these two parties of the Left was not resolved until it was too late. By March 1933, Hitler was in a powerful position as chancellor and, by August 1934, as Führer.

**Thinking skills**

In what way does the SPD election poster support the view that the relationship between the Social Democrats and the KPD was, at this critical time, very poor?

## Stage 6: the establishment of the Führer state, August 1934

After 1933–1934, Germans found themselves subjected to the beliefs of Adolf Hitler's movement, until 1945. Ascribing the rise of Hitler to the position of chancellor to the errors of others is only partly accurate. The NSDAP, since 1923, had worked steadily to build up its organization and establish links with other movements of the Right that would enable them to seize opportunities offered by the years of despair after 1929.

In 1937 G. Ward Price commented on the contribution to Nazi success of the steps taken after the release of Hitler from Landsberg prison:

> *Never has any Party prepared for power more thoroughly than the Nazis during the eight years between Hitler's release from Landsberg and his arrival at the Chancellorship. Their campaign was by no means confined to speeches and propaganda. With German zest for organization the framework of the Nazi movement was expanded and departmentalized until it had virtually became a "shadow government".*
>
> *It had its "Cabinet", consisting of Hitler and his intimate advisers; a political department, with sub-divisions gradually extending throughout the country: a Press and propaganda organization; and bureaux for dealing with labour questions, agricultural interests, financial matters.*
>
> *There were technical corps for the Party's motor and aerial transport; supply-services which passed large contracts for uniforms, banners and Party equipment; an insurance fund for the dependents of members killed*

*or injured in clashes with the communists. A legal branch conducted the lawsuits in which the Party was frequently involved, and lastly the defence departments of an actual Government were represented by the Storm Troopers (SA) and the "Protection Guards" (SS) organized on military lines under their commanding officers, Ernst Röhm and Heinrich Himmler.*

Such impressive organization required financing a Evidence indicates that magnates such as Fritz Thyssen, Friederich Flick and the IG Farben chemical group made contributions towards the NSDAP, although they also contributed to other non-socialist parties. As HA Turner pointed out, industrialists, by the crisis years, were investing the money as "political insurance premiums" in the sense that they sought to "buy political insurance against the eventuality of a capture of the government".

Funding of other parties, especially the DNVP, was just as significant and the "alliance" of the DNVP leader Hugenberg, with whom Hitler had made common cause over opposition to the Young Plan in 1929, provided the Nazis with access to Hugenberg's communications empire (both press and film in the form of the UFA cinema chain). Hugenberg, "animated by insatiable political passions and hatreds masquerading as convictions", provided a vehicle for Nazi propaganda and a link to conservative and other right-wing movements as seen in the meeting of Nazis, military leaders, and industrialists in Harzburg in October 1931, where Hitler was able to portray himself as potential leader against the dangers of communism.

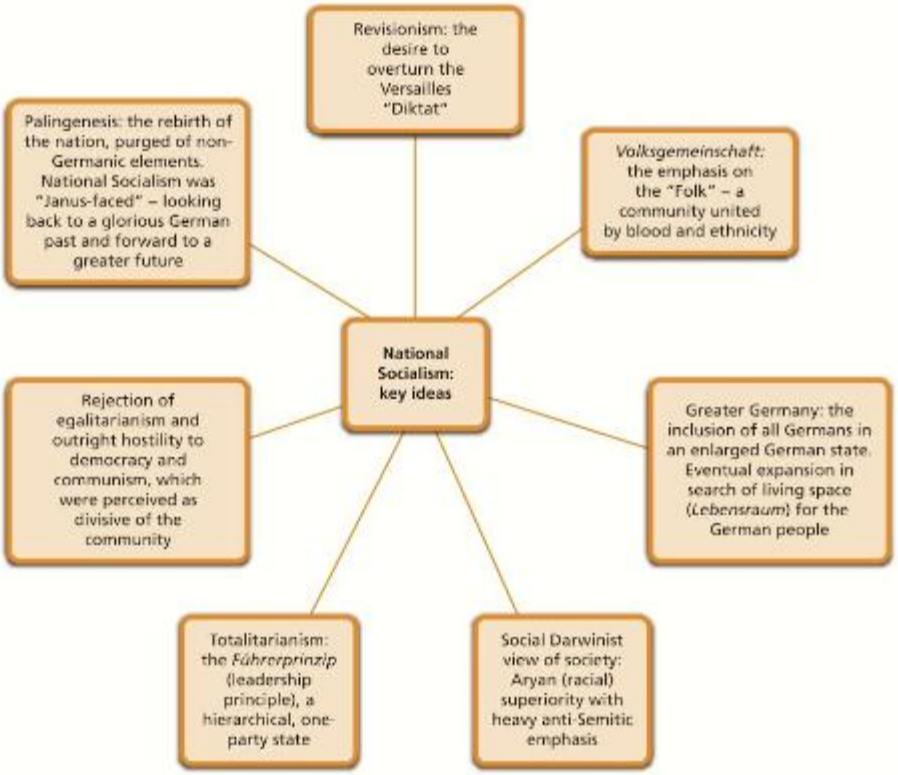
The popularity of the NSDAP by late 1932, despite the drop in electoral support, should not be underestimated. While reasons for Hitler's accession to the position of chancellor can be attributed to other factors, many German voters (although not a majority) found the message of National Socialism attractive in the post-1929 depression years. Not all who voted for the Nazis were committed to all points of the Nazi package but, having cast their vote, they enabled the National Socialists to portray themselves as the choice of a significant part of Germany's population. This was what convinced important groups to collaborate with them by 1933.

The ability to remain consistent in policy, combined with the fear factor of 1930–1933, allowed Hitler to put himself forward as a national saviour. It also convinced the political elite to "hire" him to rescue Germany from further descent into political and economic chaos, from which only the KPD seemed to be benefiting.

David Schoenbaum described these ideas, set out in *Mein Kampf*, as "the jail-born reflections of a frustrated revolutionary", but in the hothouse of discontent after 1929, they struck a chord with many Germans. Whether Germans who voted for the NSDAP agreed with all the ideas is debatable, but a vote for National Socialism was a vote in a sense for the package. Nationalists, anti-Semites, and anti-communists may have been attracted to individual elements but the National Socialist state and Hitler proved consistent in its pursuit of all the elements once in power.

### ATL Research and communication skills

1. Read the article "Who voted for the Nazis?" by Dick Geary (*History Today*, Vol. 48 (10), October 1998 available at http://www.johndclare.net/Weimar6_Geary.htm).
2. Identify the particular appeal to voters (by gender and social class) of the NSDAP, 1928–1932.
3. In groups, discuss the particular appeal of the NSDAP to specific sectors of German society, and why other sectors appear to have been relatively immune to the Nazi appeal.




▲ The ideas of National Socialism

In early 1933 the Nazis were still part of a coalition government. Only in the following months did the Party convert itself into a virtual dictatorship, confirmed by August 1934 on the death of Hindenburg and the adoption, by Hitler, of the position of Führer (combining the office of chancellor and president).

Roger Griffin wrote:

> *For those who came under its spell, the Hitler movement alchemically transformed a generalized despair at the present order of society, a sense of being a foreigner in one's own country, into hope for the future, a sense of belonging. This, rather than anti-Semitism or middle-class reaction as such accounts for the build-up of the party and the SA before 1928, despite the pathetic showing at the ballot box. … the slogan "Germany awake", the omnipresent Swastika with its connotations of mystic regeneration and the appearance of Hitler as the embodiment of a new order could symbolize the hopes and certainties which the Weimar state could no longer provide.*

# 4.2 Hitler's consolidation of power, 1934–1935

## Conceptual understanding

### Key questions

- To what extent was Nazi rule by 1933–1934 the result of conservative groups, fearful of the Left, "hiring" Hitler?
- To what extent did Nazi foreign policy help to keep the regime in power?
- What were the major foreign policy objectives and actions undertaken by the regime?

### Key concepts

- Significance
- Continuity

Nazis used the term "*Machtergreifung*" (seizure of power) to describe the appointment of Hitler as chancellor in January 1933 although, as Eatwell points out, "at first, this was more a statement of hope than a description of political reality". From January 1933 to August 1934 Hitler focused on converting his position to one of complete control by eliminating obstacles to Nazi rule. He was able to do this by using intimidation and bribery and both the political elite and the Left opposition failed to combat his moves.

## Hitler as Chancellor

The decision to call new elections in March 1933 was Hitler's attempt to seek to improve Nazi election figures, which had declined in the November 1932 Reichstag vote. Given that he was now able to use his position as chancellor and take advantage of the roles of Göring as Prussian Ministry of the Interior (Prussia being the largest by far of the German states) and Frick as National Minister of the Interior, it was believed that the NSDAP was capable of achieving an absolute majority for the first time in Weimar's troubled history.

### The burning of the Reichstag

The burning down of the Reichstag on 27 February, a week or so before the March election, has been interpreted as a Nazi ploy to frighten voters into giving their support for the NSDAP as a bulwark against a supposed KPD uprising. There is little doubt that Marinus van der Lubbe was responsible for the fire but whether he was acting alone, was a victim of National Socialist subterfuge, or part of a larger communist conspiracy remains unclear. It appears that the NSDAP stood to gain most from the fire. Hitler, according to Hermann

Rauschning (who later fell out of favour with the regime), remarked: "The Reichstag Fire gives me the opportunity to intervene. And I shall intervene." Rauschning reported later, from exile, that "Göring described how 'his boys' had entered the Reichstag building by a subterranean passage from the President's palace, and how they had only a few minutes at their disposal and were nearly discovered".

Van der Lubbe was tried and executed. Rauschning and anti-Nazi contemporaries such as Willi Münzenberg (author of *The Brown Book of the Hitler Terror*) blamed the NSDAP for the fire, viewing it as a Nazi attempt to portray the incident as the beginning of a KPD insurrection. According to Münzenberg, the KPD were the victims of a Nazi conspiracy. Given the subsequent ease with which the KPD were dealt with, it appears that they were woefully unprepared to defend themselves, far less spark a revolution. For Hitler, it allowed him, as chancellor, to carry out his dream of "crushing ... the murderous pest with an iron fist".

Using the excuse that Germany was endangered by a communist *coup d'état*, Hitler persuaded Hindenburg to issue an emergency decree that temporarily suspended basic rights and "thus was laid one of the legal cornerstones of the Nazi dictatorship".

## The March 1933 election

The election of March 1933 resulted in a leap in votes for the NSDAP, which gained 288 out of 647 seats in the Reichstag (43.9 per cent) – still not an absolute majority despite the propaganda campaign and anti-communist hysteria that characterized the Nazi pre-election campaigning. Only with the collaboration of the DNVP and their 8 per cent of the vote was Hitler able to form a majority coalition. Even at this stage, and despite the propaganda value of the Reichstag fire, the majority of German voters were unwilling to deliver an outright majority for the Nazis.

What was significant, as Richard Evans has pointed out, was that

> *... nearly two-thirds of the voters had lent their support to parties – the Nazis, the nationalists, and the communists – who were open enemies of Weimar democracy. Many more had voted for parties, principally the Centre party (Zentrum) and its southern associate the Bavarian People's Party, whose allegiance to the Republic had all but vanished.*

Street violence preceded and followed the March elections as Nazi SA members (brownshirts) attacked KPD and SPD paramilitary organizations, Reichstag deputies and offices. The breakdown of law and order initiated by the Nazis was the excuse used by Hitler for tighter measures to save Germany from a chaos largely manufactured by the Nazis themselves.

The KPD, whose leaders had been arrested after the Reichstag fire, found itself a forbidden organization. While the names of communist candidates had not been removed from the election lists and the party itself gained 81 deputies, none was permitted to sit in the newly elected parliament or vote on legislation.

**Election results of the main parties, March 1933**

| Party | Result (in approximate % terms) |
|---|---|
| KPD | 12 (81 deputies) |
| SPD | 18 |
| DDP | 1 |
| Zentrum/BVP | 14 |
| DVP | 1 |
| DNVP | 8 |
| NSDAP | 44 |
| Others | 2 |

## The Enabling Act and the end of democratic government

Hitler introduced an Enabling Bill that would allow him to rule by decree for four years, essentially making him dictator. His coalition with the DNVP gave him 52 per cent. By eliminating the 12 per cent of the KPD, by intimidating many of the SPD deputies from attending the meeting in the Kroll Opera House (the new venue for the Reichstag after the fire), and by offering the Zentrum/BVP guarantees for the protection of rights of the Catholic Church, the two-thirds majority he needed was surpassed. All deputies who attended the session, except those of the SPD, voted in favour of the Bill – thus making it into the Enabling Act (444 to 94 deputies voting in favour).

Through bullying, banning, and "buying" the support of the Catholic parties (with approval from the Vatican, which in 1929 had already made an agreement with the fascist regime in Italy), democratic government was buried in Germany. Hindenburg signed the Bill, more or less transferring his constitutional powers to the chancellor. Whether Weimar's death was the result of political murder or political suicide remains an area of debate.

Otto Wels, the SPD leader in the session, delivered the epitaph for democracy and for his doomed party when he declared:

> *In this historic hour, we German Social Democrats solemnly profess our allegiance to the basic principles of humanity and justice, freedom and socialism. No Enabling Act gives you the right to annihilate ideas that are eternal and indestructible.*

The fact that he attended the meeting with a concealed cyanide capsule in case he were to be arrested and tortured for his opposition, revealed the level of brutalization political and parliamentary life had reached.

The passage of the Act in March 1933 was the prelude to a raft of legislation as the Nazis implemented the process of ***Gleichschaltung***. The Enabling Act alone was no guarantee that all institutions within Germany were committed to National Socialist rule. Institutions such as the Churches and the military, the labour movement, and the civil service had to be brought under control in order to make Nazi power a reality.

***Gleichschaltung***
Literally, "coordination": the means whereby Hitler intended to consolidate Nazi power over Germany. Described by Sir Horace Rumbold (British Ambassador to Berlin) as the attempt to "press forward with the greatest energy the creation of uniformity throughout every department of German life", the process aimed to identify and eliminate all anti-Nazi elements.

## The purge of the civil service

The Law for the Re-establishment of the Civil Service of April 1933 was enacted to avoid the difficulties that had plagued Weimar. It constituted a purge of the civil service, allowing the government to remove elements it considered anti-Nazi. "Officials who are not of Aryan descent" were to be dismissed, as were "officials whose political activities hitherto do not offer a guarantee that they will at all times support the national state without reserve".

The intention was to remove anyone hostile to National Socialism as well as those of Jewish descent in public service – employees in the fields of the judiciary, diplomacy, and education. This "cleansing" was also an opportunity to reward loyal Nazis (the "Old Fighters" or *Alte Kämpfer* – those who had joined the party before September 1930) as well as to attract what became known as the "March Violets": those who joined the Party after March 1933 to further their careers.

### Socialism and National Socialism

"Socialism" in the Marxist sense was not what was meant in the context of National Socialism. Whereas the former was a political philosophy dedicated to the complete overthrow of capitalism and which stressed the primacy of the working class, Hitler's use of the term was based on the idea of community – the *Volksgemeinschaft* (characterized by blood and ethnicity) rather than class, which was held to be divisive. The original 25-point programme contained anti-capitalist elements, but the concept of private property and protection of small businesses was emphasized.

Some Nazis did reject the power of big business (the Strasser brothers, for example) but Hitler was willing to accommodate the major industrialists during his rise to power (an example of his pragmatism) in order to gain financial and political support – much to the irritation of these more radical elements who, after 1933, expected more attention to the material needs of the workers.

## The abolition of trade unions and political parties

The labour movement was associated with Leftist influence, and the Nazis sought to break the trade unions and the power of organized labour. In May 1933 such organizations were abolished and replaced by a Nazi-run organization known as the German Labour Front (DAF). Collective bargaining and the power to strike were forbidden as Hitler announced his plan to re-establish "social peace in the world of labour" and replace "discord" with "harmony" in the interests of the "people's community".

The single-party state was technically established by July 1933, when all political parties except the NSDAP were abolished. The Zentrum/BVP voluntarily dissolved (on 5 July) with the prospect of the signing of a Concordat between the National Socialist state and the Vatican (signed 20 July 1933). Similarly, the DVP and the DNVP bowed to pressure or the promise of guarantees of job security in the new Germany (under the Law for the Re-establishment of the Civil Service) and accepted self-dissolution.

## The Night of the Long Knives (1934)

The purge of Germany's civil service was followed on 30 June by a purge of the Sturmabteilung (SA) through a series of murders the Night of the Long Knives. This purge was carried out for a variety of reasons:

- rivalry between its leader Ernst Röhm and leading Nazis such as Heinrich Himmler (chief of the SS) and Göring
- the claim that Röhm was planning a "second revolution" to redistribute wealth (Hitler had failed to distance himself from industrialists and big landowners)
- the fear that Röhm's ambitions to amalgamate the SA and the armed forces under his control would antagonize the army.

Berliners joked about the SA, referring to many of the ordinary members as "beefsteaks" – "brown on the outside but Red on the inside" – but there was little evidence that an SA-led putsch, far less a "socialist" one in terms of more radical members of the NSDAP, was on the cards. By eliminating Röhm and his supporters Hitler was able to assuage the army leadership's fears (and those of big business) and pave the way for an accommodation with the one institution which by 1934 still had the ability (physically) to oppose the regime. On 3 July 1934, the government retroactively passed the Law Relating to National Emergency Defence Measures justifying the murder of the victims of 30 June as having been necessary "to suppress attempts at treason and high treason".

The radical elements in the Party, alongside the rumours of a "second revolution", threatened not only established groups but also Hitler's control of the Party – hence the need to placate these groups, establish the *Führerprinzip* and eliminate a perceived rival. The "blood purge" of

the Night of the Long Knives was used not only to bring the SA under control but also to settle scores with what had become known as the Left wing of the Party – the radicals such as Gregor Strasser (murdered) and his brother Otto, who was forced into exile. Old enemies from the days of the Beerhall Putsch were also removed on the pretext of once more "rescuing" Germany from chaos.

### The administrative structures of the new Reich

Political control of the NSDAP increased with the adoption of new administrative structures for the new Reich based on Nazi Party structures that had existed before 1933. By 1934 the state governments of Germany no longer existed and were replaced by a scheme intended to enforce central control and the hierarchical system of a totalitarian state. The country was divided into *Gaue* (regions essentially the same as the old states or Länder) under a *Gauleiter* appointed by, and answerable to, Hitler. There were 32 such *Gaue* in 1934 and 42 by 1945. Each *Gaue* was subdivided into *Kreis* (district), *Ort* (town or city), *Zell* (street) and *Block* (building). The purpose of the structure was to coordinate Nazi control throughout the state and not only administer but also, in conjunction with the Gestapo, supervise the population of the Reich at all levels to enforce obedience and conformity.


▲ The cover of *Kladderadatsch* magazine, published 2 April 1933. The caption reads "Spring cleaning".

On 10 August 1934 Hindenburg died. Hitler announced himself Führer and the army (*Reichswehr*), grateful for the removal of Röhm whose ambition had been to merge the SA and the army under his leadership, swore a personal oath of loyalty to Adolf Hitler:

> *I swear by God this sacred oath, that I will render unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Führer of the German Reich and people, supreme commander of the armed forces, and will be ready as a brave soldier to risk my life at any time for this oath. …*

The institution that had been so grudging in its acceptance of the Weimar government and constitution was seduced by the possibility of rearmament and increase of numbers. Satisfied by the "blood purge" it now surrendered to the National Socialist state and became a servant of the regime.

Between January 1933 to August 1934, Hitler successfully transformed his position from that of leader of a coalition government to ruler of a single-party state. Coordination or *Gleichschaltung* had been rapidly applied to consolidate Nazi rule and the process of control was to expand thereafter to maintain it.

**ATL Thinking skills**

What process is being referred to in the illustration? What elements are being swept away by the housewife?


▲ Hitler's consolidation of power, 1933–1934

## Hitler's methods

Here is a summary of the methods Hitler used in his rise to power.

### Demonization

Groups and individuals were identified as hate symbols and used to rally support from different groups within the German population. Groups were encouraged to unite behind the Nazis' policy of "negative cohesion" against the supposed enemies of Germany:

- Jews
- the Marxist threat posed by the KPD, and, in Hitler's eyes, the SPD
- the "November Criminals" – those who signed the Armistice of 11 November 1918
- Weimar "traitors" who signed the Versailles "Diktat" of June 1919.

### Violence, intimidation and murder

- The Beerhall Putsch of 1923

  This imitation of Mussolini's March on Rome of October 1922 was unsuccessful, but it permitted a national platform for Hitler at the ensuing trial.


▲ The caption on this poster reads: "The National Assembly, by its signature, is in agreement with the peace treaty."

- Paramilitary organizations (the Sturmabteilung/SA and later the Schutzstaffel/SS)

  These organizations protected Party meetings, disrupted the meetings of other parties, and won control of the streets of Germany during the Weimar era.

- Intimidation of SPD deputies

  Hitler used intimidatory tactics in his attempt to gain the two-thirds majority to pass the Enabling Bill in March 1933; street violence increased before and after the Reichstag fire in February.

- Murder

  According to Rudolf Diels, head of the Gestapo in Prussia, 500–700 political murders of Nazi opponents were carried out between March and October 1933, many by the SA forces appointed as auxiliary police after Hitler's appointment as chancellor in January 1933.

## Abuse of the democratic system

After 1923–1924, Hitler followed a dual path: intimidation of enemies and the pursuit of power through the ballot box, "outvoting" his opponents rather than simply "outshooting" them.

Goebbels made no secret of the nature of Nazi tactics in pursuing votes in the Reichstag. In 1928 he made clear:

> *…We are an anti-parliamentarian party that for good reasons rejects the Weimar constitution and its republican institutions. …We see in the present system of majorities and organized irresponsibility the main cause of our steadily increasing miseries.*
>
> *Do not believe that parliament is our goal. … We are coming neither as friends or neutrals. We come as enemies. As the wolf attacks the sheep, so come we.*

- Transformation of the NSDAP from a largely Bavarian/Munich-based party to a national organization. Membership growth of the party was significant. In 1925 there were 25 000 members, by 1927 there were 72 000, and by 1931 there were 800 000. The party was organized into geographical sections and separate departments for youth, women, campaigning, policymaking, SA and propaganda. This allowed the party to be well positioned for elections and campaigns by 1930 onwards.
- Collaboration with existing interest groups (big business/industrialists) and political parties such as the Zentrum/BVP and DNVP by late 1932, early 1933.
- Appointment of Hitler as chancellor by Hindenburg: perfectly legal according to the provisions of the constitution.
- Passing of the Enabling Bill by more than the required two-thirds majority.

## Propaganda

Joseph Goebbels was responsible for the Nazi propaganda campaign from 1929 when he was appointed Reich Propaganda Leader of the NSDAP. Prior to that he had published *Der Angriff* (*The Attack*), a weekly newspaper dedicated to promoting Nazi ideas. Goebbels has been credited with the stage-managing of Nazi propaganda that helped capture the attention of potential supporters in the period before 1933. Techniques used to "advertise" the party and the leader ranged from

radio broadcasts, film shows, torchlight processions, mass meetings, and the use of loudspeakers, banners and the innovative "Hitler over Germany" campaign of 1932. In the presidential election campaign of 1932 – during which Hitler ran against Hindenburg – Nazi "dynamism" was characterized by Hitler's literal use of flying visits across the nation to address audiences.


▲ The caption on this 1932 campaign pamphlet reads, "Hitler over Germany"

By the late 1920s and early 1930s the propaganda machine was greatly aided by the link to Hugenberg, who provided access to the press and film theatres of UFA as well as introductions to leading businessmen whose funding could be used to pay for impressively coordinated Nazi campaigns.

## Charisma and powers of oratory

Connected to the issue of propaganda is that of Hitler's charisma. Many accounts emphasize his hypnotic attraction for audiences. This is a difficult aspect to evaluate. Was the appeal of his speeches due to their content (often repetitive and with little detailed information about solutions to complex problems) or the performance?

Otto Strasser, writing from exile in 1940, remarked:

*Hitler responds to the vibrations of the human heart with the delicacy of a seismograph, or perhaps a wireless receiving set, enabling him, with a certainty with which no conscious gift could endow him, to act as a loudspeaker proclaiming the most secret desires, the least admissible instincts, the sufferings and personal revolts of a whole nation… I have been asked many times what is the secret of Hitler's extraordinary power as a speaker. I can only attribute it to his uncanny intuition, which infallibly diagnoses the ills from which his audience is suffering…*

Albert Speer, who joined the NSDAP in 1931 and later rose to become Minister of Armaments, commented:

> *Goebbels and Hitler knew how to penetrate through to the instincts of their audiences; but in the deeper sense they derived their whole existence from these audiences. Certainly the masses roared to the beat set by Hitler's and Goebbels's baton; yet they were not the true conductors. The mob determined the theme. To compensate for misery, insecurity, unemployment, and hopelessness, this anonymous assemblage wallowed for hours at a time in obsessions, savagery, licence… for a few short hours the personal unhappiness caused by the breakdown of the economy was replaced by a frenzy that demanded victims. And Hitler and Goebbels threw them the victims. By lashing out at their opponents and vilifying the Jews they gave direction to fierce, primal passions.*

For Speer, his joining the party was not due to the offerings of any party programme. As he declared: "I was not choosing the NSDAP but becoming a follower of Hitler, whose magnetic force had reached out to me."

## The programme offering of National Socialism

This was the mix of features such as **palingenesis**, ultra-nationalism, racism, revisionism, appeals to a *Volksgemeinschaft*, anti-Marxism, German expansionism, and anti-Semitism, which was targeted at the disillusioned, the frustrated, and the fearful. The "catch-all" nature of the programme would never win over significant elements of the Left but it acted as a "life raft" for those seeking safety from unemployment and political uncertainty.

**palingenesis**
National rebirth, a core idea of National Socialism.

## Pragmatism

Hitler's views were dogmatic in many respects but his willingness to adapt to circumstances, to play down or drop parts of the original Nazi programme, enabled him to advance the cause of the NSDAP. Notable here was the abandoning of the anti-capitalist stance permeating the 25 points and the cooperation Hitler sought with industrialists and businessmen such as Hugenberg. This was illustrated by his appearance before the Industry Club in Dusseldorf in January 1932, where his speech was greeted by the assembled businessmen with "long and tumultuous applause" when he stated:

> *Today we stand at the turning point of Germany's destiny. If the present development continues, Germany will one day of necessity land in Bolshevist chaos, but if this development is broken off, then our people will have to be taken into a school of iron discipline. … Either we shall succeed in working out a body-politic hard as iron from this conglomerate of parties, associations, unions, and conceptions of the world, from this pride of rank and madness of class, or else, lacking this internal consolidation, Germany will fall into final ruin…*

Later, in February 1933, to another meeting of industrialists, he declared:

> *Private enterprise cannot be maintained in the age of democracy; it is conceivable only if the people have a sound idea of authority and personality…*

Similarly, despite earlier hostility towards other parties such as the DNVP and the Zentrum/BVP, Hitler was able by the early 1930s to work with them, whether through the Harzburg Front of October 1931 with the DNVP (to "protect our country from the chaos of Bolshevism and to save our polity from the maelstrom of economic bankruptcy") or through collaboration with the Catholic parties to secure the Enabling Act in March 1933.

## Opportunism

The NSDAP recognized the opportunities presented by circumstances. AJP Taylor claimed that "only the Great Depression put the wind into the sails of National Socialism", but the sails were already there in 1929 as a result of Hitler's organization of the party in previous years. Slogans about "Work and bread" in a time of desperation played well to many.

Similarly, the Reichstag fire, whether caused by the Nazis or not, played into Hitler's hands at a critical time – just before the March 1933 election. The party was able to benefit from conjuring up the threat of an alleged revolution, and to eliminate the KPD as an effective opposition, inside or outside the Reichstag.


▲ *Der Wahre Jacob*, 14 February 1931

**ATL Research and thinking skills**

Look at the illustration on the previous page.

1 With which political party was the publication *Der Wahre Jacob* associated?

2 What point is being made in the cartoon above in relation to Nazi electioneering to different audiences?


▲ *Der Wahre Jacob*, 14 January 1933. The caption reads: "Stages in the life of Adolf Hitler"

**ATL Thinking skills**

1 Explain what each of the four illustrations refers to in terms of the [political] life of Adolf Hitler.

2 What might an illustration drawn in February 1933 have shown?

3 What might an illustration drawn in August 1934 have shown?

## Bribery

Where force proved ineffective, the NSDAP was able to "buy" support in the period up to August 1934. Acts of bribery led to:

- the NSDAP/DNVP alliance of March 1933, to give an absolute Reichstag majority
- the collusion of the Zentrum/BVP in burying Weimar when they voted in favour of the Enabling Act
- the "deal" with the army following the elimination of Röhm, whose SA had once sung of "the grey rock" (the army) being drowned in a "brown flood" (the SA) and the death of Hindenburg.

## Other factors

Hitler's rise to power (and consolidation up to August 1934) was also made possible by acts of commission or omission by other groups or parties:

- The lack of a solid base for the democratic experiment in Germany; Weimar's legitimacy was never sufficiently accepted throughout the period
- The abuse of constitutional provisions such as Article 48 that undermined the functioning of accountable democratic government by March 1930
- The failure of political parties to work the system of proportional representation in the spirit in which it had been designed – too many parties proved unwilling and unable to work for the success of parliamentary rule
- Disillusionment with Weimar policies and actions from 1919 and the inability to deal with economic crises in the early 1920s and 1930s; the brief period of respite under Stresemann was not enough to anchor the system on a solid foundation
- The failure of the army to support democracy, a system it regarded with distaste and outright hostility
- The schism (division) on the Left during the life of Weimar, which hindered any real attempt to unite against extremist parties of the Right – what the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm in 2002 referred to as the "suicidal idiocy" of Moscow's failure to promote an anti-Nazi front until too late
- Fear of the Left by important sections of society (big business, the Catholic Church, and so on), which led to support for National Socialism, or to an unwillingness to confront it before 1933/1934
- Political intrigue (jobbery) on the part of figures such as Hindenburg and von Papen and the fatal underestimation of Hitler who it was believed could be controlled.

External factors also had a role in weakening the chances of democracy flourishing, from the imposition of what most Germans perceived as a humiliating and punitive peace treaty to the Franco-Belgian invasion of the Ruhr in 1923 (following Germany's defaulting on reparations payments) and the US stock market crash in October 1929.

Winston Churchill later referred to the reparations issue as a "sad story of complicated idiocy". And five months before the outbreak of war in Europe, Robert Vansittart (Chief Diplomatic Adviser to the British government in 1939) reflected wistfully:

> *How different things would have been if we had all provided the Republican regime in Germany with greater concessions and with greater authority and credit. We might have all lived happily ever afterwards.*

## The opposition during the Third Reich, 1934–1945

The Nazi state's objective was to exercise a monopoly of power over all aspects of the lives of the population. The party and its leader were exalted as infallible, omniscient and omnipotent. The essence of totalitarian government, as Hannah Arendt remarked, was "total terror" – the instrument used to enforce conformity and eliminate opposition to the will of the leader and the party. As Bracher noted, the totalitarian goals of 20th-century single-party states, whether they were "Russian Bolshevism, Italian fascism or National Socialism" shared "common techniques of omnipresent surveillance (secret police), persecution (concentration camps), and massive influencing or monopolizing of public opinion".

Both "stick and carrot methods" were used to achieve the Nazi goal. As well as brute force, propaganda (through radio, print, and film), control over education, and economic and social policies designed to alleviate the suffering of the masses were used to "seduce" the population into accepting the new regime. Bribery and patronage had helped bring the Nazis into power and were also used to maintain that power.


▲ *Der Wahre Jacob*, 7 January 1933. The caption reads: "Darn it, the paint is peeling off everywhere." The paint tin is labelled "brown".

**Research and thinking skills**

What point is the cartoonist making regarding Nazi political progress in early January 1933, and why?

### The nature of the opposition

Most Germans remained loyal to the regime. McDonough estimated that less than 1 per cent engaged in active opposition, and most Germans accommodated themselves to domestic and foreign policies that proved popular, certainly up to 1942. Fear of punishment was partly responsible for an attitude of "tepid neutrality" among potential resisters.

Hans Rothfels, commented: "no one has the right to pass facile judgment on conflicts of conscience and the possibility of unqualified resistance who has not himself fully experienced the trials of life under a totalitarian system". Rothfels was critical of the view that German "submissiveness" permeated the Nazi period and that too many Germans "pursued the policy of the ostrich".

Opposition ranged from "silent opposition" (refusing to offer the Nazi salute, telling jokes about Hitler and the regime) to more active opposition such as sabotage in the workplace, the circulation of anti-Nazi propaganda and plots to assassinate Hitler (the most well known being

the 20 July 1944 bomb plot). Motives of the opponents of the regime varied – from a desire to morally and ethically resist Nazi policy, to a desire to salvage what was possible in the last phase of the Second World War, when defeat by the Allies appeared certain.

Rudolph Herzog in 2006 published *Heil Hitler, Das Schwein is tot* (*Heil Hitler, the pig is dead*), a collection of jokes told during the Nazi regime. Such humour was no laughing matter, as noted in the review of Herzog's book in the German magazine *Der Spiegel*:

> *… by the end of the war, a joke could get you killed. A Berlin munitions worker, identified only as Marianne Elise K., was convicted of undermining the war effort "through spiteful remarks" and executed in 1944 for telling this one:*
>
> *"Hitler and Göring are standing on top of Berlin's radio tower. Hitler says he wants to do something to cheer up the people of Berlin. 'Why don't you just jump?' suggests Göring."*
>
> *A fellow worker overheard her telling the joke and reported her to the authorities.*

## The treatment of the opposition

Whether active or "silent", opposition to National Socialism faced an apparatus of terror that was effective in repressing dissent. In April 1933 Göring established the police state of the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolitzei*) when he transformed the existing Prussian political police service, with its new headquarters in Berlin. Reitlinger pointed out the irony that "The Gestapo … was the successor of the political police" which was in fact "a product of the Weimar constitution of 1919 conceived in the double fear of Bolshevism and Freikorps anarchy … an instrument waiting for a dictator to come to power". This element of continuity was also witnessed in the remarkable number of former Weimar police who continued in the service of the Gestapo after 1933 when, for example, referring to figures in late 1938, "it was found that all but ten or fifteen out of a hundred Gestapo men in Coblenz had joined the police under the Weimar Republic".

This outwardly formidable structure of repression was the instrument used to maintain order within Germany, although much recent scholarship has stressed the level of collaboration with the secret police among ordinary citizens, who informed upon "enemies of the state". With 30 000 officers at its peak, the Gestapo relied on the aid of a "culture of denunciation" among many who sought to benefit from the turning in of supposed enemies of the regime. The image of a monolithic and all-seeing secret police was fostered by the system itself, as part of its tactics of inducing an atmosphere of fear to dissuade resistance. This combination of fear of the apparatus of repression and the cooperation of informants was capable of stifling opposition throughout the period of Nazi rule.

### The Gestapo

The official secret police of Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe. In 1933 Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS (*Schutzstaffel*) – originally formed as Hitler's personal bodyguard in 1925 but greatly expanded by 1933 – was appointed leader of the Gestapo. Hence the Gestapo fell under the control of the SS, much to the annoyance of Göring. By 1936 Himmler's appointment as Chief of Police as well as SS leader led to a bewildering overlapping of police services and intelligence-gathering offices under Himmler and his second-in-command Reinhard Heydrich. In 1939 the various police functions and forces were combined under the control of the RHSA (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, or Reich Central Security Office), which wielded authority over the Gestapo, the SS, the SD (the intelligence service of the SS), and the Kriminalpolizei (Kripo). From its formation until his assassination in Czechoslovakia in 1942, Heydrich headed it.

## The main forms of resistance

Failure of opposition from the Left contributed towards the rise to power of Hitler. The failure of the KPD in particular to change strategy until 1935 enabled the Nazis to consolidate power. The legacy of distrust between the KPD and SPD remained, even in the face of the brutal repression of both parties after 1933. Two other major institutions had the power to oppose (both before and after 1933) but also failed to do so: the military and the Churches. While groups within each institution attempted to challenge the Nazi state, they, like the Left, proved incapable of undermining the regime.

A despairing report from SOPADE, the executive committee of the SPD in exile, from 1937 perhaps summarizes the general situation concerning resistance to the Nazi state, whether from religious or Leftist political principles:

> *The number of those who consciously criticize the political objectives of the regime is very small, quite apart from the fact that they cannot give expression to this criticism. . . .They do not want to return to the past and if anyone told them that their complaints about this or that aspect threaten the foundations of the Third Reich they would probably be very astonished and horrified.*

From North Germany, an SPD agent reported in 1938:

> *The general mood is characterized by a widespread political indifference. The great mass of the people is completely dulled and does not want to hear anything more about politics…*

### Opposition from the Left

Both the KPD and SPD were early victims of the Nazi attack on Marxism. As early as January 1933, the Left found itself the target of physical violence from the SA street fighters who were incorporated as auxiliary police by Göring in Prussia. The Reichstag fire led to the banning of the KPD and the threats and intimidation of SPD deputies in March 1933 indicated what lay ahead for anti-Nazi opponents.

In late March 1933, Dachau concentration camp near Munich was set up to intern and re-educate political prisoners. Many of the inmates in Dachau and later camps in Sachsenhausen (1936) and Buchenwald (1937) were under "protective custody", which meant no trial was necessary under emergency regulations introduced by the regime. In later years these main camps bred satellite camps that fell under the supervision of the SS. Originally they were detention centres; only later did they become extermination centres.

### Opposition from the KPD

By late 1932 the KPD had gained significant electoral support, with almost 6 million votes in the November 1932 Reichstag election, and a party membership of 360 000. The rapidity with which the KPD was broken was astonishing. The arrest of the KPD leader Ernst Thälmann and leading party cadres in March, followed by further waves of arrests, rendered the party's organizational structure on a national level ineffective.

Some leaders who evaded capture (Wilhelm Pieck, Franz Dahlem, and Wilhelm Florin) removed themselves to Paris to build up opposition, while others remained in Berlin to organize some form of resistance (one of whom, Walter Ulbricht, later became leader of the GDR). Leaflets, the issuing of underground newspapers, the raising of red banners, and the continued circulation of the official Party newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* were the main activities undertaken – yet no serious consideration was given to an armed insurrection. The KPD still held to the belief that the Hitler regime was the last kick of desperate capitalism and would soon collapse.

This ideological stance played into Nazi hands. The increased printing of anti-Nazi propaganda and its clandestine distribution in Germany was meant to keep spirits of party members high but did little to threaten the developing Hitler state. Continued arrests of party members sapped morale and open protest was minimal.

The ideological misinterpretation of the nature and strength of the emerging Nazi state and the loss of initiative led to radical rethinking by August 1935, when Moscow, through the Comintern (the Communist International) dropped its hostility to the "social fascism" of the Social Democratic Party and advocated the policy of a "popular front" of all forces that had suffered from the rise of fascism. It was a case of relatively little, too late. By this point the KPD's centralized structure was in tatters – and what cooperation in a "popular front" did exist was undertaken by émigrés at interminable meetings in foreign capitals: internal opposition of any substance did not materialize.

The outbreak of civil war in Spain in 1936 and the opportunity to fight fascism on foreign soil distracted many German communists from the lack of success in Germany. In August 1939, when Moscow and Berlin signed a non-aggression pact, KPD members found themselves faced with a dilemma: the National Socialist enemy had suddenly become involved in a friendship agreement with the USSR. Confusion and disillusionment followed in Germany. Only after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 (Operation Barbarossa) did the "German comrades", under Stalin's orders, renew resistance. But Moscow's directives on the need to work towards the defence of the USSR were of little consequence inside Germany. While KPD communist exiles in Moscow urged industrial sabotage to halt the Nazi war effort, such attempts were on a small scale and often unsuccessful. The SPD remained sceptical of the "popular front" idea, given its previous experience with the KPD and the fact it appeared to be a policy more to defend Moscow's interests and Soviet security than to liberate Germany from National Socialism.

### Opposition from communist groups

Groups of communists – or communist sympathizers – such as the Uhrig Group in Berlin were small, both in number and in terms of impact. Support of the USSR during the Second World War was an unpopular and unattractive prospect. The group's attempts to disrupt war production were small scale and, like the Home Front and the Baum Group whose actions were focused on producing anti-Nazi

leaflets, their life and effectiveness were limited by the ability of the Gestapo to identify and eliminate their threat to the regime in 1942. Similarly, the attempts of the Red Orchestra (*Rote Kapelle*), members of which were employed in government ministries and who sought to pass on details of Nazi economic and war effort capabilities to the USSR, were short-lived.

Round-ups by the Gestapo of communists involved in industrial disruption, illustrated the extent to which the party was incapable of organizing any effective opposition. By 1944 the remnants of KPD domestic resistance were swept up. The myth of "heroic resistance" by the KPD, which was to form the basis of future historical writing in the GDR, was simply that. The party, a tool of Moscow's policies throughout the Weimar and Nazi eras, failed to provide an alternative to the rise or rule of the extreme Right.

## Opposition from the SPD

With a party membership of approximately a million and a sound performance in the elections of 1932 and March 1933, the SPD was well placed to organize resistance to the encroaching totalitarian system. Those SPD deputies able to attend the Reichstag meeting during the debate on the Enabling Bill were the only ones to vote against its passage. By June, the party was officially banned by the regime, its funds confiscated and the leadership removed itself first to Prague, then Paris and later, from 1940–1945, to London.

In exile, the SPD undertook similar actions to the KPD: distributing news-sheets and posting anti-Nazi leaflets. While specific groups emerged inside Germany to carry out anti-Nazi propaganda (for example, Red Shock Troop/*Der Rote Stosstrupp* and New Beginning), the numbers involved were small and by 1938 these groups and their activities, which proved little more than irritants to the Hitler regime, were arrested.

Alongside Gestapo efficienct, economic conditions in Germany by the mid to later 1930s also undermined Social Democratic efforts to maintain contact with industrial workers. As Hartmut Mehringer noted, "full employment and increasing demands for production and working hours left less time for (clandestine) meetings that had previously benefited from unemployment and temporary employment". Arguably, material improvement in the lives of former supporters of the SPD sapped their commitment to the SPD underground programme. Isolated meetings in bars, homes, and restaurants of SPD sympathizers were not a major challenge to the Reich. SOPADE was unable to mobilize mass opposition and, while some small socialist opposition groups remained below the radar of the Gestapo, the very nature of their low-level activities and secrecy of meetings to ensure safety was not conducive to promoting serious resistance.

## Opposition by the military

During the Weimar era the army had not committed itself to the Republic wholeheartedly. It stood largely on the sidelines in the critical period 1930–1933 but in August 1934 submitted to the Hitler state with an oath of personal loyalty to Adolf Hitler as Führer. While its support was "bought" by visions of a Nazi foreign policy that rejected the

the nation during such a critical period. When the tide turned against Germany with major losses on the eastern front by 1943, the group was able to attract more support in Germany and establish contact with British and US officials.

What would replace the Hitler state, though, remained an obstacle for Britain and the USA, which viewed the Beck–Goerdeler group with suspicion, interpreting their motives as being not so much anti-Nazi as an attempt to avoid the possibility of defeat and invasion by the Soviet Union. Additionally, plans put forward by the group for a post-Hitler state smacked of an authoritarian system not in keeping with democratic principles – in a sense a reactionary system, looking back to monarchical and Wilhelminian Germany and reflecting the conservative beliefs of the politicians and officers involved.

In loose collaboration with the Beck–Goerdeler group were leading members of the ***Abwehr*** led by Admiral Canaris and Hans Oster. Both had been involved in anti-Hitler activities since 1938 and the Sudetenland crisis. In association with others in what was known as the Kreisau Circle, led by Helmuth James von Moltke, plans were laid throughout 1942–1944 to physically remove Hitler. An estimated six assassination attempts were made unsuccessfully in 1943 but Operation Valkyrie, the July bomb plot of 1944, has remained most prominent (although also unsuccessful) in accounts of the military–conservative resistance to Hitler.

***Abwehr***
The intelligence service of the German Foreign Office.

## Operation Valkyrie, 1944

The Beck–Goerdeler group produced Operation Valkyrie, the plan to kill Hitler, in July 1944, a month after the Normandy Landings in France and just after the beginning of Operation Bagration on the Eastern Front, which was to produce, by August, a crushing defeat of German forces in Belorussia and Eastern Poland as Soviet armies headed towards Germany. The timing of Valkyrie has led to claims that the motives of the conspirators were based not just on moral qualms about National Socialism but on the necessity to remove Hitler, negotiate a rapid peace with the British and French, and prevent an invasion of German soil by the advancing Red Army. Less cynically perhaps, General Henning von Tresckow, who played a central role in the planning of the coup, stated:

> *The attempt on Hitler's life must take place at any cost. If it does not succeed, the coup d'état must nevertheless be attempted. For what matters is no longer the practical object, but that before the world and history the German Resistance movement should have staked its life on risking the decisive throw. Compared with this nothing else matters.*

Similarly, another plotter, Erwin Planck declared:

> *The attempt … must be made, if only for the moral rehabilitation of Germany … even if thereby no direct improvement of Germany's international prospects is achieved.*

The planned assassination was to be carried out by Claus von Stauffenberg, although an impressive range of military leaders was also involved and knowledgeable about what was to happen – including Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who approved of the coup but who preferred the prospect of arresting and putting Hitler in the dock on charges of war crimes.

Hitler survived the explosion and the retribution carried out against the plotters was swift and terrible. Some conspirators chose suicide, many were sentenced to death and the military–conservative opposition was wiped out after Gestapo round-ups. Executions of opposition elements continued up to early 1945. Under *Sippenhaft* laws, the principle of collective guilt was applied and led to the punishment of family members of the accused, even though there was no proof of their complicity in the plot.

### The German resistance and the Allied powers

The German resistance, unlike resistance movements to National Socialism in parts of occupied Europe during the Second World War, received little external help from the Allied powers. Despite the protestations of German opponents of the Nazi regime that they were committed to the overthrow of an evil Nazi state, suspicions of their motives remained. References to "moral rehabilitation" and the need to address the judgment of the court of world history were not enough to earn the resisters physical support for their objectives. Even after the war's end, for the western Allies, a cloud of doubt hung over the real motives of those who acted in Operation Valkyrie in July 1944.

## Opposition from the Catholic Church

If, as Ernst Nolte argued, "The origin of the Right (in Europe in the interwar years) lies always in the challenge of the Left", the actions of the Catholic Church in abetting the rise of the Nazis can be understood in the light of its anxiety about Bolshevism. The papacy had already, in 1929, signed a series of agreements with the Italian leader Mussolini (the Lateran Treaties), which helped provide legitimacy for Mussolini's single-party state. The growth of the KPD in Germany by 1932 frightened not only the existing political elite but also the Catholic Church and its political representatives (Zentrum and BVP).

The Zentrum and BVP, frequently part of democratic coalition governments during the period, abandoned any commitment to the restoration of accountable democratic government after March 1933 when they helped to pass the Enabling Act. By July 1933 voluntary dissolution of the party occurred following Hitler's signing of a Concordat with the Catholic Church, in which he promised not to interfere in Church affairs (including the right of the Church to retain and establish Catholic schools and promote Catholic youth groups) in exchange for a guarantee that the Church would abstain from interference in political life. Such an agreement had been sought with the Weimar government previously, but without success. The Papal Nuncio (representative) in Germany who negotiated the settlement was Cardinal Pacelli (later Pope Pius XII), a keen admirer of Hitler's anti-Marxist beliefs.

Political Catholicism, in the form of organized parties that had played a role in German political life from the time of Bismarck, ceased to exist. Its disappearance was achieved through false promises on the part of Hitler and short-sightedness on the part of the Catholic Church – but it shared this myopia with other political figures and Christian religious groupings at the time. If the Catholic Church had assumed it was to be "a loyal dialogue partner", in van Norden's words, it was to be disappointed. *Gleichschaltung* envisaged not only the elimination of political opponents but also the taming and subjugation of religious institutions. "Coordination" meant that *all* aspects of life were to be controlled and channelled towards meeting the will of the Führer. When Catholic bishops, in a pastoral letter in August 1935, publicly protested against what was described as a "new paganism" sweeping the state, it was already too late. The repressive apparatus of the totalitarian state found no major difficulties confronting a religious institution that had effectively dismantled its political parties in 1933 at the same time as giving respectability to the Nazi regime when it appeared to have Vatican approval.

The promises made in the Concordat were, for Hitler, expedients: *Gleichschaltung* was about winning over Catholic (and Protestant) Churches at the outset of Nazi rule until the force of the totalitarian state could be organized. A gradual erosion of Catholic rights followed as legislation was enacted to limit Catholic religious education, press, and youth groups. At no time did the Vatican actively challenge the increasing brutality of the regime in its persecution of minorities such as the Jews, or of political groups of the Left.

Individual clerics did take a stand on policies such as euthanasia and sterilization – the most prominent being Bishop Graf von Galen – but the one major critique by the papacy in March 1937 by Pope Pius XI, an

encyclical (a papal letter sent to all bishops of the Catholic Church) entitled "With Burning Anxiety", was less an attack on the policies of National Socialism towards minorities and persecution of political enemies than a criticism of Nazi breaches of the Concordat in relation to the Catholic religion in Germany. Pius's main emphasis, as Stackelberg and Winkle pointed out, was on "spiritual and doctrinal matters". To the credit of individual priests (many of whom were interned in Dachau), dissenting messages were delivered from some pulpits, but as an institution the Catholic Church failed to provide any organized resistance to the state.

## Opposition from the Protestant Churches

Catholicism was particularly strong in southern Germany and the Rhineland but Protestantism, for example, in the form of the Protestant Evangelical Church, was the largest Christian Church in Prussia. As early as September 1933 Ludwig Müller was elected Reich Bishop by a national synod (council) of the Evangelical Church when the 28 regional Protestant Church organizations, with the backing of a group known as the "German Christians", attempted to transform the Church into one preaching a specifically German national religion in the service of the Nazi state – a Christianity stripped of study of the Old Testament (described as a Jewish book and therefore unfit for study by Aryans). This *Reichskirche* (Reich Church) was short-lived: Evangelical ministers resented and resisted the political machinations used to elect Müller and formed the Confessing Church under the leadership of Martin Niemöller. In 1934 they held a synod of the Confessional Church in Barmen, and the resulting Barmen Declaration rejected the "false doctrine" of the Reich Church.

Resistance to the Nazi-sponsored Reich Church was largely resistance to interference in Church affairs rather than outright condemnation of the political principles of National Socialism. Most clergy remained silent on the increasing persecution of the Jewish population and the aggressive nature of Nazi expansionism. Those who did speak out were interned in concentration camps (Niemöller was arrested in 1937 and detained until 1945) but the majority of pastors and their congregations did not organize themselves and challenge the political basis of a single-party state that extinguished civil liberties. Interestingly, Niemöller offered to fight for Germany during the Second World War – an offer which was not taken up but which perhaps revealed the dilemma facing many Christians, torn between resistance to government attempts to control the Church and feelings of patriotism.

### Thinking skills

For the full text of the Barmen Declaration, see Stackelberg and Winkle, *The Nazi Germany Sourcebook* (Routledge, 2002), pages 168–9.

To what extent did it resist the policies of the National Socialists?

## Opposition from Jehovah's Witnesses

Although very much a minority religious group (approximately 25 000–30 000 members), Jehovah's Witnesses stood out as steadfast opponents of the Nazi state. Banned soon after the Nazis came to power, they continued to challenge the state by their refusal to give the Hitler salute or join Nazi organizations (including the armed forces) and they were accordingly ruthlessly persecuted. As Detlev Garbe noted:

> *...the courage of conviction and the (under the circumstances) recklessness of the numerically rather insignificant religious community occupied surprisingly large circles: at times, the highest legal, police, and SS organs were occupied with the "Bible Students' Question".*

Despite such bravery, the comparatively small numbers involved limited the impact of their dissent. It is estimated that 10 000 were imprisoned and 250 executed for their refusal to serve in the military.

### Youth/student opposition

Much has been made of youth/student opposition to the Hitler regime but, despite the best efforts of authors and film studios to glorify the brave efforts of these relatively few individuals, it appears they had little effect. The Edelweiss Pirates and its regional variations (the Essen Gallivanters, the Viennese Shufflers, the Stäuber gangs in Danzig) were resistant to the officially sanctioned Hitler Youth, but their activities (occasional leafleting, adopting nonconformist dress and listening to "non-Aryan" music) were more examples of "youthful disobedience" than political resistance. While their impact was limited, several of them did pay the ultimate price for their unwillingness to conform.

In the summer of 1942 through to early spring 1943, the Munich-based "White Rose" group began circulating flyers calling for passive resistance to the state. Motivated partly by the experience of some of their members who had witnessed the horrors of the campaign against civilians in the Soviet Union – and also by Christian religious beliefs – the flyers, especially after the German army's disastrous defeat at Stalingrad, emphasized the need for peace. The Allies used the subsequent arrests, trials, and executions for treason of the members of the group for propaganda purposes, but the impact of the group on the Nazi war effort was minimal. Arguably, for many Germans, whether staunch supporters of Nazi ideology or not, the thought of betraying the nation by harming the war effort at a critical stage was unacceptable.

As Ian Kershaw argued:

> *The mere presence of a ruthless repressive apparatus is usually sufficient to intimidate the mass of the population into not actively supporting the resistance… large proportions of the population did not even passively support the resistance, but actually widely condemned it.*

## Propaganda and its role

Joseph Goebbels, was appointed Reich Minister of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda after March 1933. In a press conference soon after his appointment, he emphasized the fact that:

> *It is not enough for people to be more or less reconciled to our regime, to be persuaded to adopt a neutral attitude towards us, rather we want to work on people until they have capitulated to us.*

In a subsequent meeting with radio officials, he stressed the need to achieve "a mobilization of mind and spirit in Germany". To that end he recruited talented, well-educated party loyalists to staff the new departments of his ministry: Budget and Administration; Propaganda; Radio; Press; Film; Theatre; and Popular Enlightenment.

To promote the Nazi ***Weltanschauung*** among the population, the state established a monopoly over all media, eliminated all materials hostile to the spirit of National Socialism ("alien elements"), and promoted a cult of the Führer to bind the people together. Methods used varied but, as Goebbels admitted, "I consider the radio to be the most modern and the most crucial instrument that exists for influencing the masses." His instruction to Nazi officials placed in charge of radio broadcasting to, "At all costs avoid being boring. I put that before everything..." illustrates his approach to spreading the Nazi message: that propaganda should be dynamic, like the movement itself, and use methods that were "modern, up to date, interesting, and appealing: interesting, instructive but not schoolmasterish".

***Weltanschauung***
A particular philosophy or view of life of an individual or group.

## Broadcasting and the press

Cheap radios – the *Volksempfänger* or "people's receiver" – were mass-produced, ensuring that the message of National Socialism was broadcast to the population. By late 1939 an estimated 70 per cent of German households possessed a radio that was deliberately manufactured with a limited range of reception to block foreign broadcasts. Such radios and loudspeakers were also installed on the factory floor, in public areas, and in bars and cafes. Goebbels established large-scale transmitters to broadcast propaganda to foreign states. By 1938 short-wave stations were transmitting in 12 languages to countries as far away as the USA, South Africa and the Far East.

Even during the Weimar period, radio was a state monopoly, which made it easy to establish control over the airwaves. It proved more difficult to implement a monopoly over the press, but the process of *Gleichschaltung* used to remove obstacles in the political and religious spheres was also used to "coordinate" Germany's press. Socialist and communist newspapers were banned early on in the regime (as were the parties themselves) and in 1934 the Reich Press Law imposed "racially clean" journalism. Jewish and liberal journalists were sacked and Jewish owners of newspapers such as the Ullstein publishing house were forced to sell out to the Eher Verlag, the official Nazi publishing house. While their ownership changed, Goebbels did allow existing newspapers to keep their names and layout – although daily directives from the Ministry dictated the line they had to follow.

At an early press conference delivered in March 1933, Goebbels made it clear what the role of the press in Nazi Germany would be:

> *I see in the task of the press conference held here daily something other than what has been going on up to now. You will of course be receiving information here but also instructions. You are to know not only what is happening but also the Government's view of it and how you can convey that to the people most effectively. We want to have a press which cooperates with the Government just as the Government wants to cooperate with the press.*

Reporters and editors had to prove their "racial and political loyalty". The Hitler state thus controlled "ownership, authorship and content of the newspapers", as Noakes and Pridham observed in their documentary analysis, *Propaganda and Indoctrination in Germany, 1933–9*.

### Propaganda and the deification of Hitler

The deification of Hitler in the media generally was a main plank of Nazi propaganda. His "infallibility" and "omniscience" were repeatedly alluded to in feature films, weekly newsreels shown in cinemas, over the airwaves, and in officially approved literature. Such "Führer worship" was also present in the annual "public rituals" introduced by the regime to mark significant dates in the development of the Hitler state:
30 January, to remember the appointment of Hitler as chancellor;
20 April to celebrate Hitler's birthday;
1 May, a "National Day of Labour";
September rallies in Nuremburg; and
9 November, to commemorate those who died in the 1923 Beerhall Putsch. These occasions reminded the people and the party faithful of Nazi tribulations and how they had been overcome under Hitler's leadership. Speechmaking, parades, and public shows of support were expected on these occasions. Failure to enter into the National Socialist spirit could be noted and reported.

## Literature, music, and film

The Propaganda Ministry also influenced the fields of literature, music, and film. The task of propaganda was not only to promote Nazi ideology but also to attack and eliminate alternative views to the Nazi "world view". Writers not aligned to the ideals of the party were unable to publish or circulate their works after 1933, and driven into exile. An early indication of the treatment of what was considered "non-German" literature occurred on 10 May 1933 in Berlin where Goebbels presided over the burning of books considered poisonous to "the soul of the German people". The works included not only those of German writers, past and present, but foreign authors.

Department VII of Goebbels Ministry was entrusted with controlling the output of literature available to the population. Rigorous control over publishing houses, authors, bookshops and libraries ensured that only writing acceptable to the Nazi party was printed and available for public consumption. Writers were permitted to produce work and publish it (subject to scrutiny by Department VII) as long as it conformed to one of four main categories:

- *Fronterlebnis* (front experience), which emphasized German heroism in battle and the bonds established by the common experience
- works promoting the Nationalist Socialist *Weltanschauung*, as reflected in the outpourings of the Führer
- *Heimatroman* (regional novels stressing the uniqueness of the German spirit)
- *Rassenkunde* (ethnology), which stressed the superiority of the German/Aryan race over all others.

Above all, *Mein Kampf* was actively promoted as the model for German writing. Censorship was justified on the basis that the banned works were a threat to "National Socialist cultural aspirations" and too often reflected the increasing "Jewish cultural infiltration" of the Weimar era.

In music, the state lauded the works of Wagner (Hitler's favourite composer), but German orchestras were not allowed to play music by composers from a Jewish background (such as Mendelssohn). "Modern" experimental music works by composers such as Paul Hindemith were banned from public performance, being considered "degenerate" and atonal (not written in any key or mode) by Hitler. Like writers, musicians left for foreign states because of the restrictions placed on them.

Germany's film industry fell under the control of the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment. Weimar's cinema was considered a stronghold of Jewish influence and purges of producers, actors, and film music composers of Jewish background took place soon after 1933. That same year the Nazi propaganda films *SA-Mann Brand*, *Hitlerjunge Quex*, and *Hans Westmar* were released, to celebrate the role of the SA, a murdered Nazi youth, and an SA martyr (Horst Wessel) killed by communists, respectively.

In 1935 Leni Riefenstahl produced her film documentary *Triumph of the Will*, based on the 1934 Nuremburg rally. Party rallies were meant to stress not only unity of the party but to build the cult of the Führer, which through the medium of film could be screened throughout the nation.

In 1938 Riefenstahl went on to produce *Olympia* based on the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, once more a cinematographic celebration focused less on the competition and the competitors but on portraying the monolithic nature of the National Socialist state and its leader.

By the Second World War, films with an anti-Semitic bias were being produced (*The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo*, *The Jew Süss*) and wartime production was geared to sustaining morale – as was the case in the Allied nations. While an estimated 1363 feature films were produced during the regime, not all – or even the majority – were overtly propagandistic. Even Goebbels realized that the population required more than simply a film diet of Nazi ideology.

### *Triumph of the Will*

Piers Brendon described this film as "brilliant and repulsive" and one that "elevated propaganda into an art form". In it, according to Brendon, "Hitler descends from the clouds, his plane casting the shadow of a cross over marching stormtroopers" in a scene "heavy with messianic symbolism… [in which] Hitler tried to inspire the devotion of the people by presenting himself as the incarnation of their destiny".

## The theatre

Goebbels was in charge of supervising theatre productions, the result being the purging of actors and producers with Jewish and leftist sympathies. The flight of playwrights to foreign countries echoed the situation in the fields of literature, film, and music. Berthold Brecht fled first to Denmark and then to the USA, where his output included anti-Nazi works such as *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, parodying the process of the Nazi rise to power. In the Reich itself, theatre was controlled through the Reich Theatre Chamber under Hanns Johst, who sponsored propaganda pieces such as *Schlageter* – a play based on an early Nazi martyr killed in 1923 during the Franco-Belgian occupation of the Ruhr. While plays by Shakespeare and renowned German playwrights such as Goethe and Schiller were permitted, increasingly the theatre became a vehicle for performances that exalted the virtues of German nationalism, past and present, and the evils of communism and democracy.

## Art

The Nazi state sought to eliminate the "Bolshevization" of art, which they claimed, had characterized the Weimar era – the *Judenrepublik* (the "Jewish Republic"). To combat what Hitler perceived as sickness and decadence in the arts, a Reich Chamber of Culture and a Chamber of Visual Arts were established. Artists had to join the latter and were vetted for their political reliability. Again, many artists unable to work in such conditions left the country (Klee, Kandinsky, Grosz, and Kokoschka, for example) as the government mounted exhibitions of "degenerate art" (*Entartete Kunst*) and sponsored exhibitions of art by approved artists.

Museums and galleries were subject to raids by Nazi officials to remove anything considered not in the spirit of National Socialism, the product of "Jewish decadence" or modern art forms such as expressionism or cubism, which Hitler disapproved of. The message of Nazi art in visual form was the projection of what Snyder referred to as paintings that "stressed heroism … rustic family scenes, Storm Troopers marching with their banners, and fruit harvesting by bare-bosomed Amazons", in other words art "purged of pretentiousness and crazy rubbish". Artists in the Third Reich – as in the USSR under Stalin – were seen as what Stalin referred to as "engineers of the soul" – tasked with spreading the messages of the regime.

## The Nazi regime's foreign policy, 1933–1939

In the Nazis' rise to power, foreign policy objectives were in some ways little different from those of other German nationalist politicians, principally in the desire to revise the "Diktat" of Versailles. Resentment against the post-war treaty was not exclusive to Hitler's party but what did differentiate the Nazis were the calls for a Greater Germany (the inclusion of all ethnic Germans in central Europe within the borders of an enlarged state) and the acquisition of ***Lebensraum*** in the east – the conquest of land and resources as the basis for German world power. Hitler's interpretation was based on gaining land in Poland and the USSR. Not only would this provide guaranteed material resources for the regime and its population, but war would also ensure the elimination of the Soviet state – also a mainstay of Hitler's foreign policy before and after 1933.

Fritz Fischer commented on the continuity of German foreign policy "directions", seeing Hitler in some respects as a continuer of trends observable in German foreign policy from the eras of Wilhelm II and Stresemann. Pre-Weimar Germany's plans for German economic and political dominance (hegemony) were seen in the idea of a "Mitteleuropa" as described by Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg after the outbreak of the First World War. This would entail the reduction of French and Russian power, annexing parts of eastern Europe, and establishing spheres of influence over territory such as the Ukraine, valued especially for its fertile land.

While Stresemann achieved great respect internationally for his diplomatic achievements in the interests of peace in Europe, he too was pursuing a foreign policy geared to winning concessions and preparing the ground for the revision of Versailles – but in a peaceful manner. He stated in a private letter to the former Crown Prince in September 1925:

> *In my opinion there are three great tasks that confront German foreign policy in the more immediate future… the solution of the reparations question, the protection of Germans abroad, those ten to twelve millions of our kindred who now live under a foreign yoke in foreign lands, the readjustment of our eastern frontiers; the recovery of Danzig, the Polish corridor, and a correction of the frontier in Upper Silesia.*

As he stressed, though, in relation to the use of military force to achieve these goals, "That, alas, we do not possess". Hence a case can be made that Hitler was *in some ways* pursuing goals that had been present under previous government systems – but in a far more ambitious and brutal manner.

In a speech to the Reichstag on 28 April 1939, Hitler declared:

> *I have further tried to liquidate that Treaty sheet by sheet, whose 448 Articles contain the vilest rape that nations and human beings have ever been expected to submit to. I have restored to the Reich the provinces grabbed from us in 1919; I have led millions of deeply unhappy Germans, who have been snatched away from us, back into the Fatherland; I have restored the thousand-year-old historical unity of German living space; and I have attempted to accomplish all that without shedding blood and without inflicting the sufferings of war on my people or any other. I have accomplished all this, as one who 21 years ago was still an unknown worker and soldier of my people, by my own efforts…*

***Lebensraum***
"Living space": the idea that Germany needed more land in order to survive. A concept used even before the First World War, when it had been used basically in reference to colonial ambitions, *Lebensraum* became an important element of Nazi ideology and foreign policy.

### ATL Research and thinking skills

1. Why did the regime adopt its foreign policy aims: for example, to overturn grievances caused by perceived injustices inflicted upon the state; to bolster the prestige of the regime by appealing to nationalistic instincts; to distract the attention of the population from a failing or lacklustre domestic programme?
2. With specific reference to actions, discuss in what ways, and with what success, foreign policy objectives were achieved in the short and longer term.
3. In both cases, was there any evidence to suggest that the regime's foreign policy was a continuation of the policy of previous governments, or did it exhibit a contrast – in aims and methods?

**Willi Brandt (1913–1992)**
The future chancellor (SPD) of the Federal Republic of Germany (1969–1974), Brandt was at this time a member of the Socialist Workers' Party, having left the SPD in 1931. He rejoined the SPD in 1948.

**ATL Thinking and communication skills**

Discuss the following questions:

1 Were German foreign policy moves in the period 1933–1935:
   a) reckless, and a threat to general European peace?
   OR
   b) shrewdly planned, cautious moves largely acceptable to other European great powers, which were either consumed by their own internal problems or a feeling of **meaculpism**?
2 What factors during the above period prevented Hitler's pursuit of a forceful expansionist Nazi foreign policy?
3 What factors explain the adoption of a significantly more adventurous foreign policy after 1935/36?

**meaculpism**
A feeling of guilt or responsibility for past actions provoking German nationalism and bitterness due to the "unjust suffering" inflicted on Germany in 1919 at Versailles

**ATL Research and thinking skills**

With reference to the origin and purpose of SOPADE reports, assess the values and limitations of such reports for historians studying the effect of Hitler's foreign policy moves up to 1939.

As early as March 1935, when the Nazi government announced military conscription in defiance of the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, a SOPADE report stated:

> *Enormous enthusiasm on 17 March. All of Munich was out on the streets. You can force a people to sing, but you can't force them to sing with that kind of enthusiasm … The trust in Hitler's political talent and honest will is becoming greater, as Hitler has increasingly gained ground among the people. He is loved by many.*

As Kershaw points out:

> *The bold moves in foreign policy that Hitler undertook to overthrow the shackles of Versailles and reassert Germany's national strength and prestige were, therefore, guaranteed massive popular support as long as they could be accomplished without bloodshed.*

Between 1933 and the outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, Nazi foreign policy successes in righting the wrongs of 1919 ensured that, when war did occur, the population accepted the conflict with resignation, if not widespread fervour. A successful revisionist attack on the "Diktat", allied to domestic policies linked to economic recovery and full employment, meant that most Germans not targeted as enemies of the state (and punished accordingly) gave their support to the regime in the war effort – not because of belief in Hitler's racist or anti-Semitic beliefs but because he had restored German pride. The manufactured cult of the Führer, became even stronger as the state monopoly of the media worked ceaselessly to promote adulation of the "leader" and his role in the national salvation of Germany. Again, as Kershaw indicated:

> *On a clandestine visit to Germany from his Norwegian exile in the second half of 1936, Willi Brandt, no less, admitted much the same: that providing work had won the regime support even among those who had once voted for the Left.*

From 1936 to early 1939, with the growth of German military power and in conjunction with the reluctance of great powers to physically resist breaches of the Treaty of Versailles, German foreign policy gains were impressive – and popular. A SOPADE report on Hitler's uncontested remilitarization of the Rhineland remarked upon the "universally impressive" response of the German population and the fact that many were "convinced that Germany's foreign policy demands are justified and cannot be passed over. The last few days have been marked by big fresh advances in the Führer's personal reputation, including among the workers".

Similarly, the union with Austria in March 1938 was noted in another SOPADE report as having produced "enormous personal gains in credibility and prestige" for Hitler and the regime. Any doubts among the majority of Germans about the wisdom of challenging the Versailles settlement and the potential risks involved had evaporated as the "wrongs" of 1919 were corrected.

Territorial acquisition and successful revision of the humiliations imposed upon Germany produced, as Kershaw noted, an image of Hitler and the National Socialist state as "a defender of German rights"

and Hitler as an accomplished statesman who had achieved "triumphs without bloodshed". By 1938 he had presided over:

- the restoration of the rich industrial Saarland to Germany (although this was really the result of a League-supervised plebiscite of the population and in keeping with the Versailles Treaty)
- the restoration of military sovereignty
- the recovery of the Rhineland
- Anschluss with Austria and the incorporation of the Sudetenland into the Reich, in partial fulfilment of the goal of building a "Greater Germany".

The result, according to Kershaw, was the winning by the regime of "support in all sections of the German people and unparalleled popularity, prestige and acclaim".

Whether the gains of the regime's foreign policy before the Second World War were the product of a carefully planned and executed blueprint or the result of a series of pragmatic and opportunistic moves (the intentionalist versus structuralist/functionalist debate) is less relevant than the fact that successes in foreign policy generated support for the National Socialist state. Edgar Feuchtwanger stressed that, "While living in Germany, I became aware that Hitler's apparently sensationally effective coups in foreign policy were fundamental to his hold on the German people".

## The Nazi regime's foreign policy, 1939–1945

Feuchtwanger, who with his family went into exile in Britain in 1938, pointed out the problem associated with Hitler's "success": that Hitler, as a "high-risk gambler" with no interest in listening to advice, was liable to falter eventually since he became "a prisoner of his own myth and imagined infallibility". The errors in foreign policy made from March 1939 ultimately led to the breaking of "the chain of success". Despite Germany's military victories, the decisions made by Hitler meant that, after 1941–1942, overextension of German forces and lack of resources in comparison to the grand alliance – between Moscow, Washington, and a previously isolated London – would ensure Allied victory. The formation of this grand alliance did not occur until late 1941, after Hitler's June invasion of the USSR (Operation Barbarossa) and declaration of war on the United States after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Significantly, just as foreign policy success had gained the regime popular backing, foreign policy failure was to provoke not only stirrings of internal opposition but overwhelming external opposition, which would destroy the Reich.

# 4.3 The aims and results of Nazi policies

## Conceptual understanding

### Key questions

- To what extent did Nazi domestic policies help to keep the regime in power?

### Key concepts

- Significance
- Consequence

## Hitler's domestic policies, 1933–1945

Having gained power, the Nazis were expected to produce solutions to economic ills that they had blamed the previous system for neglecting or incompetently addressing. Of the pressing economic problems, unemployment was by far the most prominent.

### Employment

When Hitler came to office as chancellor, unemployment stood at around 6 million; by 1939 Germany was experiencing a labour shortage. Impressive as this sounds, it is important to note that economic recovery was already evident by late 1932. In addition, much of the reduction in unemployment was linked to the establishment of an economy based on production for possible war after 1936 (and the Four-Year Plan); and employment statistics were manipulated by a series of measures that removed large sections of the population from unemployment tables.

Victims of purges of the civil service did not count as jobless. Disincentives for married women to remain in employment, plus the offering of incentives for single women to give up employment in order to qualify for marriage loans, were followed by the introduction of a labour service for young, unemployed men and compulsory military conscription by 1935. Technically these measures removed large numbers from official statistics.

This "massaging" of unemployment figures did not detract from the fact that job opportunities arose from various government-inspired public works projects and placements in heavy industry as Germany announced its intention to breach the arms restrictions of Versailles by 1935. In pursuit of a policy of economic self-sufficiency, in defiance of the "Diktat" and to honour previous promises of *"Arbeit und Brot"* ("Work and bread"), National Socialism embarked on job creation programmes to help rebuild the economy.

### Economic recovery

Hitler viewed economic reconstruction as vital for future expansionist plans. The lessons of the Allied Blockade of the First World War, which had crippled Germany's war effort and contributed hugely to defeat, showed the

necessity for building an economy that would avoid dependence on other states. He was also aware that economic crisis had destabilized the Weimar Republic and given opponents (such as the Nazis themselves) a chance to capitalize on the failure to relieve the misery of the depression years. Maintaining power meant finding rapid solutions to immediate problems.

Historians have tended to see the measures adopted by National Socialism as a series of ad hoc programmes rather than a well-thought-out blueprint of economic planning. Big business and private enterprise were entrusted with carrying out the general aims of German economic recovery under guidance from the regime. Hitler declared that the job of the Ministry of Economics was "to present the tasks of the national economy" which "the private economy will have to fulfil". Government contracts placed with German companies ensured a partnership between the regime and industry – with the senior partner in this relationship being the government. Under National Socialism, German industry thrived in a period of enforced political "stability", a trade-union-free environment with lucrative government orders that provided profits for business.

Under Hjalmar Schacht (as president of the Reichsbank, from March 1933, and then as Minister of Economics, 1934–1937), priorities were set to deal with the unemployed and then to plan the financing of rearmament. Both issues were partly linked, in that public works programmes such as railway and *Autobahn* (motorway) construction would provide the communications infrastructure necessary for war. It was no coincidence that the majority of motorways ran east-west, although, as Burleigh pointed out, "Actually the military preferred trains and thought tracked vehicles would rip up the road surface and fracture bridges, whose load-bearing tolerances were only ascertained in spring 1939". Nevertheless, as a highly visible prestige project, similar to fascist Italy's *autostrada*, it did capture the imagination of many German and foreign observers, as well as providing work.

Schacht's "New Plan" witnessed the use of "Mefo" bills to prime heavy industry and production of armaments. These bills (a form of government-sponsored promissory note issued via a dummy company) were a way of the Reichsbank covertly financing arms production. The bills acted as a new form of currency as well as a way of hiding the involvement of the government in promoting arms production, at a time when Germany was still not strong enough to publicly challenge the arms restrictions of Versailles.

## Public works projects

Labour-intensive public works projects, for building houses, schools, hospitals, canals, bridges and railways, and the motorway scheme, offered employment and a sense of purpose to many Germans. For the regime, the establishment of the *Reichsarbeitdienst* (RAD: State Labour Service) meant that cheap and regimented labour could be used to promote German recovery. At first voluntary, service in the RAD became compulsory in 1935 for all Germans aged between 19 and 25. Labour battalions and work camps ensured authoritarian control over the recruits, who worked mainly on the land but also on building projects and were subject to Party political indoctrination in the camps. William Shirer, attending the 1934 Nuremberg Party Rally, described how 50 000 members of the RAD, "a highly trained,

semi-military group of fanatical Nazi youths… Standing in the early morning sunlight which sparkled on their shiny spades suddenly made the German spectators go mad with joy when, without warning, they broke into a perfect goose-step." It was the government's expectation that the spirit of these 1934 volunteers would be adopted after the service became compulsory in 1935.

### Göring's Four-Year Plan

In October 1936, under Göring's leadership, a "Four-Year Plan" was introduced. The plan heralded a major expansion in war-related industrial production. Hitler proclaimed that "there is only one interest, the interest of the nation; only one view, the bringing of Germany to the point of political and economic self-sufficiency". He declared his intention that, within four years, two main tasks had to be achieved: that Germany's armed forces were operational and that the economy "must be fit for war within four years".

Under Göring the projected goals of the plan were not reached, although in specific areas such as aluminium production, explosives, coal, and mineral oil the increases were impressive. Richard Overy claimed that the failure to produce a strong war economy capable of withstanding any long-term conflict helped shape the *Blitzkrieg* military tactics of 1939 onwards, which relied on quick victories in the hope of gaining much-needed resources before committing to subsequent campaigns, rather than a war of attrition for which Germany was unprepared. Noakes and Pridham estimate that by 1939 Germany was still reliant on external sources for around one-third of its raw materials. An exiled Social Democrat observer in 1938 argued that "Under the lash of the dictatorship the level of economic activity has been greatly increased" but that a fundamental problem arose:

> *One cannot simultaneously … increase armaments for the land and air forces ad infinitum, to build up a massive battle fleet, to fortify new extended borders, to build gigantic installations for the production of ersatz [substitute] materials, to construct megalomaniacal grandiose buildings, and to tear down large parts of cities in order to build them somewhere else. On the basis of the living standards of the German people hitherto, one can either do one or the other or a little bit of everything, but not everything at the same time and in unlimited dimensions.*

The revival of the economy in the field of war production took place at the expense of consumer goods production. Real wages (actual purchasing power) of German workers were less impressive than the statistics the regime publicized concerning Germany's production of pig iron, steel, machinery, chemicals, and other commodities for rearmament purposes. Shortages of consumer products and wages frozen at 1933 levels, however, were compensated for by the fact that there was employment – in comparison with the dark days of the depression years. David Crew summed up the attitude of many workers when he cited the opinion of a socialist worker in the heavily industrialized Ruhr area who commented,

> *They [the worker] had four, five, even six years of unemployment behind them – they would have hired on with Satan himself.*

## Cultural and social policies

Stripped of trade unions with which to engage in collective bargaining for wages and working conditions and forbidden to strike, German workers were provided by the government with the alternative of organizations such as the "Strength through Joy" movement under the supervision of the German Labour Front (*Deutsche Arbeitsfront*/DAF), which the Nazis introduced after the prohibition of independent trade unions in 1933. Harmony in the workplace was meant to produce social peace and increased production in the national interest.

In 1949 in the Federal Republic of Germany, a survey conducted by the Institute für Demoskopie (Public Opinion Institute) entitled "Consequences of National Socialism" reported many of the respondents looked back on the Nazi regime with some fondness in relation to the social and economic provisions it offered, claiming:

> *The guaranteed pay packet, order, KdF and the smooth running of the political machinery… Thus National Socialism makes them think merely of work, adequate nourishment… and the absence of disarray in political life.*

Nazi terror and the destruction produced by Hitler's foreign policy, while obviously acknowledged, formed only a subsidiary part of the reminiscences of those polled. Loss of personal freedom under the regime was compensated for by perceived material benefits that were enjoyed in comparison to the last years of Weimar.

For Schoenbaum, this type of selective appraisal of the National Socialist state by those who lived through it (and who were not targeted) was an example of "interpreted social reality" as opposed to the grimness of "objective social reality" – a process in which the era of National Socialism was remembered as:

> *… a society united like no other in recent German history, a society of opportunities for young and old, classes and masses, a society that was New Deal and good old days at the same time … a world of … authoritarian paternalism … of national purpose and achievement …*

### The Strength through Joy (*Kraft durch Freude*/KdF) movement

The DAF established the KdF to offer incentives to the working population in the form of leisure facilities at heavily subsidized rates, under the watchful eye of the Nazi state. On the surface a recreational organization meant to raise worker morale and production levels, the KdF offered a wide variety of activities, such as theatre visits, sports, hiking, folk dancing, excursions by train to foreign countries, and even cruises on purpose-built ocean liners. Such "carrots" would, according to Robert Ley, head of the DAF, allow the worker to "lose the last traces of inferiority feelings he may have inherited from the past" and fulfil the plan not only to boost output but also contribute towards the sense of solidarity required in the new *Volksgemeinschaft*.

## The Nazi wartime economy

The performance of the Nazi economy during the war years was bound up with the question of the extent to which Hitler's Germany could be considered a "polycratic state" – whether it was a centralized, efficient, monolithic 'Führer state' or whether it contained a bewildering variety of overlapping authorities – what Geary refers to as "personal fiefdoms" which interfered with the smooth running of not only political decision-making but, in this context, the organization of the wartime economy.

Whether Nazi policies arose from **intentionalism** or **structuralism**, there was a high degree of overlap within the regime structure which blurred clear lines of authority in specific areas and led to Nazi officials implementing fragmented policies as they interpreted what they believed was the Führer's will. Gauleiters of the occupied states acted without central coordination and pursued policies, both political and economic, which were not harnessed effectively to promote the war effort.

**intentionalists**
Historians who argue that Hitler encouraged deliberate chaos in the National Socialist state in order to create competing power centres that would allow him to be the final arbiter.

**structuralists**
People who stress the nature of the development of the NSDAP that moved rapidly from an opposition party to the party of administration in 1933–1934.

Nazi failure to establish a central wartime administration from the outset hampered successful mobilization of the nation's resources and war effort. Competing authorities, as Overy pointed out, hampered efficiency – for example, Fritz Todt as Minister of Munitions (1940–1942) had no control over the production of aircraft "which constituted two-fifths of all war production" – and this remained the case until 1944. The army was unwilling to sacrifice the production of "vanguard technologies" (high-quality weapons that were expensive in terms of labour costs and materials) for the large-scale production of standardized weaponry adopted by the USA and the USSR.

While great strides in rearmament had been made by 1939, the goals of the Four-Year Plan were not attained and the series of *Blitzkrieg* successes in 1939–1941 masked the fact that a long, drawn-out war would be difficult for Germany to sustain after the expansion of the conflict in the Soviet Union. The "New Order" that Hitler sought in Europe through military conquest was partly a political move but also an attempt to ensure Germany's economic future through ruthless exploitation of the resources of the occupied territories. Hitler's forces arrived not as liberators of the people of the USSR, for example, but as conquerors whose intention was to subjugate the population. Racial war in Eastern Europe produced resistance and an expansion of the conflict that the Reich was unable to deal with. Expansion of Germany's war effort to the Balkans, North Africa, and the Soviet Union, combined with the decision to declare war on the USA, resulted in the emergence of a united military and economic opposition that far outweighed Germany's resources.

Gordon Wright argued that the Nazis could, in the occupied territories of eastern and western Europe, have chosen to collaborate with the conquered people but, instead, their "simpler" policy of smash and grab alienated the occupied populations and led to failure to benefit from the vast resources of a militarily underestimated Soviet state. The scorched earth policy of the Soviets, which denied resources to the Nazis, and the inability to replenish the loss of military material to meet the increasing demands of an ever-broadening conflict all worked to hinder the war effort.

By 1942, Todt had informed Hitler that the result of expansion of the war against the USA rendered victory impossible. His death in February 1942 saw his replacement by Albert Speer. While Speer was credited with significantly improving the efficiency of arms production (three times more weaponry was produced in 1944 than in 1941), in combination with a massive programme of labour conscription from occupied states (headed by Fritz Sauckel), the massive Allied bombing raids on Germany by 1944 and the advance of the Red Army meant that Germany, lacking "the resources of geopolitical supremacy" faced military defeat.

## Youth and education policies

By necessity, the "Thousand Year Reich" envisaged by Hitler required future generations committed to the world view of the Nazi movement. Youth was to act as the standard bearer of the NSDAP vision of the future.

The conditioning of youth in school and through extracurricular activities and organizations was a regime priority. In November 1933 Hitler stated:

> *…when an opponent says, "I will not come over to your side", I calmly say, "Your child belongs to us already… You will pass on. Your descendants however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing but this new community."*

In November 1933 this was certainly an exaggeration of the extent to which German youth had been indoctrinated, but the Nazi state made strenuous efforts to make the claim a reality in the following years.

## The education system

Just as *Gleichschaltung* had been implemented in political and religious life, the Nazis sought to Nazify the school system. In April 1934 Bernhard Rust was appointed Reich Minister for Science, Education and Culture and tasked with establishing the educational system as a bulwark of the Nazi state, then and for the future.

Schools and universities were cleansed of teachers held to be unsympathetic to the aims of National Socialism or considered, because of their Jewish background, unfit to be in charge of the instruction of Aryan youth. Membership of the National Socialist Teachers' League (NSLB or *NS Lehrerbund*) became essential for teachers wishing to work in education. The intention was to ensure conformity in the presentation of the Nazi message to youth, by ensuring that those working in schools were subject to party control. From primary through to tertiary education, indoctrination of the young was undertaken in order to produce end products imbued with the race consciousness of the movement and absolute loyalty to the regime. In schools, curriculum changes placed emphasis on sports, biology, history, and "Germanics".

Sport was meant to produce, according to Hitler, "bodies which are healthy to the core" and capable of physical contribution to the nation – whether in the field of reproduction or military service. The teaching of history was used to promote the greatness of Germany's past, the struggles of the National Socialist movement in its efforts to destroy the "evil legacy" of a degenerate and incompetent Weimar republic, and the dangers of Bolshevism (and its "Jewish backers"). In 1938 the German Central Institute of Education stressed that:

> *The German nation, in its essence and greatness, in its fateful struggle for internal and external identity, is the subject of the teaching of history… (it) has the task of educating young people to respect the great German past and to have faith in the mission and future of their own nation…*

Interestingly, as Noakes and Pridham pointed out, even in Weimar, Germany history teaching had been much influenced by a "nationalist bias", largely a reflection of the fact that teachers had themselves "passed through a school and university system dominated by the *völkisch* nationalist ethos" of the pre-Weimar era. In this sense, National Socialist guidelines on the teaching of history supplemented (albeit to greater extremes) existing approaches to teaching in many institutions.

Biology teaching included heavy emphasis on race and eugenics (the science of improving a population through controlled breeding), inculcating the need for racial purity in the Reich by adhering to "principles" of "natural selection" and elimination of "inferiors" whose existence threatened the Aryan bloodline. Hermann Gauch's *New Foundations of Racial Science* (1934) typified the manner in which pseudo-biological teaching, masquerading as fact, was delivered in the guise of "race science". Replete with comments about the "unmanliness and barbarous feelings" of the non-Nordic, the dangers of the admixture of races, the lack of hygiene of non-Nordics and the failure of such non-Nordics to clearly enunciate ("The various sounds flow into each other and tend to resemble the sounds of animals, such as barking, snoring, sniffling, and squealing"), this widely used text went on to claim that:

> *The Nordic and the non-Nordic races have not a single characteristic in common. We are not justified, therefore, in speaking of a "human race". Nordic man is … the creator of all culture and civilization. The salvation and preservation of the Nordic man alone will save and preserve culture and civilization…*

Similarly, "Germanics" included the study of language and literature with the aim of proving the superiority of Germans as a "culture-producing" race as opposed to "culture-destroying" races such as Jews. What this meant was the rejection of any works considered hostile in spirit, or message, to National Socialist ideology and the promotion of works glorifying nationalism, militarism, sacrifice for the Nazi cause and devotion to Adolf Hitler, the Übervater (Supreme Father).

The regime made special provision for the education of future leaders. *Adolf-Hitler-Schulen* reinforced the values of physical exercise, race purity and obedience to the Führer in selected cadets. The *Nationalpolitische Erziehungsanstalten* (the Napolas, or National Political Training Institutes) focused on military discipline and duty to the leader, the party, and the nation, while the *Ordensburgen* (Order Castles) were reserved for the future ruling elite who undertook a four-year course studying racial science, athletics, and political and military instruction and indoctrination. Many students in this last category were selected from the already selective Adolf Hitler schools and Napolas, which chose potential recruits from Hitler Youth following a check on their racial background and Aryan appearance.

## Youth groups

Outside the formal institutions of education, the regime attempted to encourage conformity and apply techniques of indoctrination by establishing youth groups. Schools themselves were not considered capable of creating Hitler's declared goal for German youth, as enunciated in late 1938 – a German youth "slim and slender, swift as the greyhound, tough as leather, and hard as Krupp steel … a new type of man so that our people is not ruined by the symptoms of degeneracy of our day". Absent from the description was any reference to intellectualism or academic excellence. Such qualities were not prioritized by a regime whose leadership was deeply suspicious of academic achievement. "I will have no intellectual training. Knowledge is ruin to my young men", asserted Hitler, who equated such intellectualism with the cultural decadence which he claimed intellectuals had inflicted on Germany in the Weimar years.

### TOK discussion

In school subjects such as geography and mathematics, "subliminal messages" were incorporated into the teaching materials: basic concepts were adulterated by the introduction of political messages that accompanied the provision of the basic skills relating to the subject. For example, mathematics problems such as the following were not uncommon:

**A** *To keep a mentally ill person costs approx. 4 RM per day, a cripple 5.50 RM, a criminal 3.50 RM. Many skilled civil servants receive only 4 RM per day, white-collar employees barely 3.50 RM, unskilled workers not even 2 RM per head for their families. (a) Illustrate these figures with a diagram. According to conservative estimates, there are 300 000 mentally ill, epileptics etc. in care. (b) How much do these people cost to keep in total, at a cost of 4 RM per head? (c) How many marriage loans at 1000 RM each … could be granted from this money?*

**B** *A Sturmkampfflieger on take-off carries 12 dozen bombs, each weighing 10 kilos. The aircraft makes for Warsaw, the centre of international Jewry. It bombs the town. On take-off with all the bombs on board and a fuel tank containing 1500 kilos of fuel, the aircraft weighed about 8 tons. When it returns from the crusade there are still 230 kilos of fuel left. What is the weight of the aircraft when empty?*

1 Thomas Mann claimed Nazi education had 'sole reference, often enough with implication of violence, to the fixed idea of national pre-eminence and warlike preparedness'. Discuss how this is shown in the above examples.

2 Compare and contrast the educational aims (social, political and economic) of authoritarian and democratic political systems.

Youth movements with affiliations to Churches or political movements were exceedingly popular in Germany before 1933 and the Nazi youth organization formed in the early 1920s was only one, relatively small part, of this youth movement, accounting for approximately 50–55 000 members by the time Hitler became chancellor. That same year (1933), Hitler set up two organizations to educate Germany's young in the spirit of National Socialism: the Hitlerjugend (HJ/Hitler Youth) for boys and the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM/League of German Maidens) for girls. Accompanying their establishment was the banning of existing youth movements (aside from Catholic youth organizations, whose autonomy was guaranteed by the Concordat Hitler had signed with the Catholic Church) and the absorption of many of their members into the Nazi movement.

By 1935 the Nazi youth movement accounted for approximately 60 per cent of young Germans and on 1 December 1936 all young Germans were expected to join. Schoolteachers were instructed to promote membership of the organization. Originally the HJ and BDM catered for the age range 14–18 but efforts were made to expand the movements for 10–14-year-old girls and boys (the *Deutsches Jungvolk*/DJ and *Jungmädelbund*/JM respectively). In March 1939 membership became compulsory. As Knopp declared, "Never before in German history had the young been so courted … seduced by the feeling of being something special". Membership gave access to a variety of activities: for boys, camping and hiking expeditions, sport, music, attendance at rallies, and military training provided via specialized air and naval sections; for girls, physical fitness and domestic science in preparation for marriage and childbearing. A SOPADE report of 1934 lamented that, early in the regime, "Youth is … in favour of the system: the novelty, the drill, the uniform, the camp life, the fact that school and the parental home take a back seat compared to the community of young people – all that is marvellous".

Increasingly, as the spare time between school and attendance at HJ/BDM meetings and activities diminished, parents became reduced to a "bed and breakfast service" and parental control over offspring weakened in many cases, as parents found that their children became "strangers, contemptuous of … religion, and perpetually barking and shouting like pint-sized Prussian sergeant-majors".

The NSDAP sought to monopolize the life of the young, to wean them from parental to party control in order to maximize the opportunities for indoctrination. Retrospective accounts by members of youth organizations vary widely in the nature of their reminiscences – some looking back fondly to the comradeship experienced in the youth movements, others highly critical. Not all youth were seduced by or willing to join the movement, despite the regime's regulations, but the great majority of young Germans were recruited into youth organizations that in theory promised to:

- liberate them from the "evils" of democracy, Marxism and the supposed stranglehold of the Jews
- restore German pride and honour
- revise the Diktat of 1919.

However, in reality, they were imprisoned in a huge bureaucratic organization that stultified creative thought, producing a generation of what, according to Sax and Kuntz, "were duller and stupider, though healthier, individuals".

### Women and minorities

Women cannot be considered a minority for the purposes of answering Paper 2 questions on the impact of National Socialist policies. Minorities cover groups ranging from religious minorities (excluding the mainstream Protestant/ Evangelical and Catholic denominations), the so-called "asocials" defined by Jeremy Noakes as those considered "socially inefficient and those whose behaviour offended against the social norms of the 'national community'" and the "biological outsiders" – regarded as a threat because of their race or a hereditary defect. These minorities were what the regime considered as outcasts in the *Volksgemeinschaft* – the National Socialist conception of the racial community.

## The impact of policies on women

Hitler's view of the role of women in the Nazi state is often referred to as the attempt to subjugate women – to limit their participation in German life to "*Kinder, Küche, Kirche*" (Children, Kitchen, Church). In 1934 at the annual Nuremberg rally, he declared: "Man and woman must … mutually value and respect each other when they see that each performs the task which Nature and Providence have ordained". The intention was not to make women into second-class citizens, but to rescue them from "the false paths of the democratic-liberal-international women's movement" of the Weimar era, which had "denigrated" and attempted to destroy the dignity and honour of women through moral corruption. For the regime, although the "world of a woman is a smaller world … her husband, her family, her children, and her house", it complemented the man's world, which consisted of "the state, his struggle, his readiness to devote his powers to the service of the community". The relationship between male and female, according to public speeches, was that of a partnership in the service of the nation.

Cleansed of the immorality that Nazis argued pervaded the Weimar years, Hitler claimed that his task was to renew the traditional role of women as mothers, the basis of the family unit and the bearer of children who would ensure the "national future" in an age of declining birth rates. Indeed, Germany's birth rate was, with the exception of Austria, the lowest in Europe. For an ideology committed to expansion and anxious at the prospect of being "swamped by fecund hordes of Slavs from the East", in Noakes's words, the necessity of reversing the decline in the birth rate was obvious. As Burleigh noted, in the Nazi state:

> *Out went Weimar tolerance of a plurality of lifestyles, in which no official stigmas [were] attached to being single, childless or homosexual, and in came state-driven pro-natalist policies designed to produce "child-rich"… families.*

Anti-feminism, in the sense of rejection of liberties for females (including, for example, legal abortion and easy access to contraception) enshrined in the Weimar Constitution, was not peculiar to the Nazis. It was shared by traditionalists, the Churches and the DNVP before 1933. Hitler capitalized on the misgivings of such groups, with his plans to implement what critics have claimed to be a reactionary policy based on male supremacy, despite Nazi claims to the contrary.

### Pro-natalist policies

Pro-natalist policies (policies to encourage growth in the birth rate) were pursued through a mixture of incentives and disincentives. As an incentive, monetary rewards were offered in the form of low-interest loans, introduced in June 1933 as Section 5 of the Law for the Reduction of Unemployment. Married couples would receive a marriage loan of 1000 Reichsmarks, to be repaid at 1 per cent per month, with the amount to be repaid reduced by a quarter for every child produced

(provided it was a racially pure child). A condition of the loan was that the woman had to give up employment – leaving positions open for males. An estimated 700 000 couples received such a loan between 1933 and 1937 (a third of all marriages). By 1939, 42 per cent of all marriages received such loans. Marriage rates increased from 516 800 in 1932 (the pre-Nazi period) to 740 200 by 1934, although the birth rate did not increase significantly. Burleigh noted:

> *Although there was an appreciable short-lived increase in the birth of third or fourth children, the absence of a commensurate public housing policy did little to affect the secular drift towards modest nuclear families, with SS members especially distinguished by their failure to go forth and multiply.*

As commentators pointed out, couples preferred to have one or two children, since the expense of having more "would outweigh the advantage of the cancellation of the remainder of the loan".

Further incentives included income-tax reductions for married couples with children (and higher rates of taxation for single people or married couples without children), family allowance (child support) payments, maternity benefits, reduced school fees and railway fares for larger families and the provision of facilities such as birth clinics, advice centres, home help provision, postnatal recuperation homes, and courses on household management, childrearing, and motherhood. As Emilie Müller-Zadow, an official in the National Socialist Women's Organization, wrote in her article "Mothers who give us the future" in 1936:

> *There is a growing recognition that mothers carry the destiny of their people in their hands and that success or ruin of the nation depends on their attitude towards the vocation of motherhood … The place that Adolf Hitler assigns to woman in the Third Reich corresponds to her natural and divine destiny. Limits are being set for her, which earlier she had frequently violated in a barren desire to adopt masculine traits … due respect is now being offered to her vocation as mother of the people, in which she can and should develop her rich emotions and spiritual strengths according to eternal laws.*

In May 1939 the regime introduced the "Mother's Cross" award: gold for women who had given birth to eight children, silver for six and bronze for four – as long as parent and children were of Aryan blood, free from congenital disease, politically reliable and not classed as "**asocial**" in their attitudes or behaviour by the Party. The programme was reminiscent of that implemented by the French Superior Council for Natality since 1920.

Disincentives, in the sense of denying women control over their own bodies in terms of reproduction, took the form of the illegalization of abortion and the closing down of birth control centres and access to contraceptive devices. Breaches of these regulations resulted in convictions.

## Women in the workplace and the public sphere

Laws initially restricted the number of females in higher education and employment in the civil service after the age of 35. Nazi pronouncements and propaganda aimed at discouraging females in the workplace were made partly to fulfil Nazi ideological goals concerning the return to the "idyllic destiny" of women and partly to make jobs available for unemployed males. By 1937, though, the appearance of

▲ A recipient of the Mother's Cross, Berlin 1942. Note the older children in the uniform of the Hitlerjugend and the BDM.

**asocial**
Anyone regarded by the regime as outside the "national community": habitual criminals, tramps and beggars with no fixed abode, alcoholics, prostitutes, homosexuals, and juvenile delinquents, as well as the "workshy" (those unwilling to commit themselves to labour in the service of the Reich) and religious groups that refused to accept Nazi doctrine.

labour shortages in the economy as rearmament programmes aided rapid recovery, meant that the regime compromised its ideological stance and accepted the necessity of female employment. As Geary observed:

> *… ideological purity still had to give some ground to economic necessity: in 1933 almost 5 million women were in paid employment outside the home, whereas the figure had risen to 7.14 million by 1939.*

The earlier requirement for wives in families who qualified for marriage loans to give up work was dropped. Similarly, women's access to higher education, restricted in 1933, was now permitted because the economy and the regime required increasing numbers of professionals, in the medical and teaching professions especially. Until the end of the regime, however, Hitler continued to insist women be excluded from participation in the judiciary or in jury service, since he believed them unable to "think logically or reason objectively, since they are ruled only by emotion". While National Socialist attitudes did not change in relation to the role and status of women, there was pragmatic acceptance, given the economic demands of the later 1930s and the Second World War, that female labour was essential.

Women's role in the political system was secondary. Although the Party established organizations to promote Nazi-approved values among the female population, such as the German Women's Enterprise (DFW), National Socialist Womanhood (NSF) and the Reich Mothers' Service (RMD), their role was to funnel the decisions and policies of the male-dominated regime rather than to actively help in the formation and articulation of such policies. As Koonz commented:

> *For women, belonging to the "master race" opened the option of collaboration in the very Nazi state that exploited them, that denied them access to political status, deprived them of birth control, underpaid them as wage workers, indoctrinated their children, and finally took their sons and husbands to the front.*

## The impact of policies on minorities

For Nazis, asocials were those who did not conform to desired social norms as defined by the regime. As Noakes indicated in his essay "Social Outcasts in the Third Reich", the term asocial was a flexible one used by the government to label those it felt were undeserving of inclusion in the *Volksgemeinschaft*. These asocial groups were classified as *Gemeinschaftsfremde* – "community aliens"– those who in the eyes of the state exhibited "an unusual degree of deficiency of mind or character" according to a draft "Community Alien Law" presented in 1940. According to the state, the primary aim of this legislation was to "protect" the racially healthy community from such elements.

### Beggars and the homeless

Early targets of the regime, these groups were rounded up from September 1933. Classified into "orderly" and "disorderly" categories by the state, beggars were registered and issued with permits that required them to undertake compulsory work on the state's orders in exchange for accommodation and board. Fixed routes were introduced so that their whereabouts could be monitored. In the case of the homeless, detention in

camps such as Dachau and sterilization were imposed on many. By 1938, fearful that "he (the homeless) is in danger of becoming a freedom fanatic who rejects all integration as hated compulsion" (and thus an irritant to a state which stressed community integration), beggars and homeless people were arrested and many were detained in Buchenwald. An estimated 10 000 of the homeless were imprisoned, of whom few survived.

## Homosexuals

Homosexuals were persecuted in a move coordinated by the Reich Central Office for the Combat of Homosexuality and Abortion. The linking of these two areas under one department illustrated the view that the treatment of both was a product of "population policy and national health" as much as any National Socialist homophobic prejudice.

Paragraph 175 of the Reich Criminal Code, which made "indecent activity" between adult males illegal, predated both the Weimar government and the Nazi regime. The moral condemnation of homosexuality (and abortion) by many conservative elements in German society was not a creation of the Nazis but, under the regime, homosexuals suffered penalties much more brutal than those previously imposed. Paragraph 175 was revised in 1935 by the regime with the intention of broadening the definition of "indecent activities" as well as increasing terms of imprisonment for "offenders".

In February 1937, Himmler, the SS chief, in a speech to SS officers, explained his reasoning behind Nazi policy towards homosexuals:

> *There are those homosexuals who take the view: what I do is my business, a purely private matter. However, all things which take place in the sexual sphere are not the private affair of the individual, but signify the life and death of the nation, signify world power … A people with many children has the candidature for world power and world domination. A people of good race which has too few children has a one-way ticket to the grave …*

Identification and registration of homosexuals by the Gestapo produced records of approximately 100 000 "criminals" by 1939. Of these, according to Hans-Georg Stümke, a third were investigated and every fourth person successfully convicted by the state. After the outbreak of war, detentions of homosexuals in concentration camps increased. Between 5000 and 15 000 homosexuals were imprisoned, it is believed. Forced to wear the black dot and the numbers 175 on their prison uniform (later replaced by a pink triangle), they were subject to harsh treatment. Survivors of the camps spoke of the particular brutality shown towards homosexuals by SS guards, who regarded them as at the lowest level in the concentration camp hierarchy.

## Jehovah's Witnesses

Nazis targeted this religious group because of their conscientious objection to military service and their refusal to use the Hitler greeting or to join compulsory National Socialist organizations. Nazi "special courts", according to Burleigh, regarded them as "lower-class madmen" and the Gestapo accused them of using religion for political purposes – for "the destruction of all existing forms of state and governments and the establishment of the Kingdom of Jehovah, in which the Jews as the chosen people shall be the rulers".

The group was banned in 1933, and around a third of the community served time in custody during the lifetime of the regime; 2000 ended up in concentration camps, of whom 1200 died, either due to poor conditions or execution for conscientious objection. These "Bible students", or "Bible-bugs" as the SS termed them, were marked out in the camps by the violet triangles they wore to distinguish them from homosexuals (pink), politicals (red), criminals (green), and asocials (black). Ernst Fraenkel, in 1941, writing from exile noted in his work *The Dual State* that, "none of the illegal groups rejects National Socialism in a more uncompromising fashion than this obstinate group … whose pacifism allows no compromises". While the group was not numerically a threat to the Nazi state, its public and outspoken rejection of Nazi views meant that it could not be tolerated.

## "Biological outsiders"

Even before Nazi rule, many regarded gypsies (or, more correctly, Sinti and Roma) with suspicion. In the 1920s, police departments in Bavaria and Prussia were active in fingerprinting, photographing, and monitoring these communities. There were approximately 30 000 gypsies in Germany in 1933; by 1945 there were just 5000. The communities were doubly disadvantaged under the regime, in that their nomadic lifestyle allowed them to be classed as "workshy" vagrants (of no fixed abode) and of inferior racial status. While the number of gypsies did not constitute, in Nazi eyes, as great a threat of racial pollution as the Jewish population, they were included in legislation such as the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935.

Racial "experts" from the Research Centre for Racial Hygiene and Biological Population Studies examined the communities to determine who was a "pure" gypsy and who was a *Mischling* or part gypsy. *Mischlinge* were considered a threat to be dealt with by their incarceration in camps where they would be "made to work", pending the prevention of the "continual procreation of this half-breed population", according to Dr Robert Ritter, the Nazi "expert" on gypsy affairs. The issuing of Himmler's Decree for the Struggle against the Gypsy Plague in December 1938 marked an attempt to categorize the population more efficiently into pure gypsy and part gypsy.

The occupation of large swathes of eastern Europe during the Second World War meant larger numbers of gypsies being brought under Nazi control. At one point, both Ritter and Himmler considered the possibility of establishing a virtual reservation for "pure" Sinti and Roma – almost as a living museum, or, as Burleigh says, "as a form of ethnic curiosity", but in December 1942 an order was implemented to transfer gypsies to special camps at Auschwitz and elsewhere. Many of those transferred became victims of Nazi medical experimentation, and half a million were murdered in what has been described as the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma population of Europe in a National Socialist attempt to solve the "Gypsy Question".

## The mentally and physically handicapped

Eugenics, the belief in the possibility of improving the racial stock through selective breeding, was not unique to Hitler's Germany, but it was pursued there with enthusiasm. Just as the emphasis of the regime was to produce "the perfect and complete human animal", in the words of Baldur von Schirach, leader of the Hitler Youth in 1938, it was policy that those unable to contribute to such an aim should be considered without value – consumers of state resources that could otherwise be better used.

Programmes of sterilization and euthanasia would eliminate "hereditary defects", held to be an obstacle to the building of a genetically healthy Aryan race. This approach to "racial hygiene" was not unique to the National Socialists. Such theories were propounded in other countries – even in pre-Hitler Germany in 1932, the Prussian state government produced draft legislation for voluntary sterilization. As early as July 1933 the Nazis introduced the Law for the Prevention of Hereditarily Diseased Offspring, which justified compulsory sterilization on the grounds that "countless numbers of inferiors and those suffering from hereditary ailments are reproducing unrestrainedly while their sick and asocial offspring are a burden on the community".

The law listed conditions such as "congenital feeblemindedness, schizophrenia, manic depression, hereditary epilepsy, Huntington's chorea, serious physical deformities and chronic alcoholism" as grounds for sterilization. Whether some of the foregoing were actually hereditary was questionable – and in the case of feeblemindedness the definition was so vague that it could be used to punish those deemed to have exercised poor judgment in their support for, or membership of, the KPD, for example. Between 1934 and 1945 the state carried out between 320 000 and 350 000 sterilizations.

Sterilization, however, was only one part of a scheme to rid the Reich of those considered a "burden on the community" – "worthless life", in the words of eugenists of the 1920s. Those believed to be suffering from incurable and resource-consuming disabilities (mental and physical) were to become victims of a state euthanasia policy. In 1939 the state-sanctioned murders of adults and children began, resulting in over 72 000 deaths before the T-4 programme (named after the address of the organization responsible: Tiergartenstrasse 4, Berlin) was officially halted in 1941 after protests from the public and the Church. Official halting of the killings may have stopped euthanasia but murders continued in concentration camps of those considered "biological outcasts" and these categories were expanded to include Jews, Slavs, Sinti and Roma, through the euphemistically termed *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment).

## The Jewish population

When examining the tragic impact of National Socialism on minorities, it is the treatment of the Jewish population in Germany (and the occupied territories after the outbreak of war) that has attracted most attention from historians and the public. Jews were held to be not only *Gemeinschaftsfremde* but actual dangers to the *Volksgemeinschaft* and its future.

Hitler did not invent anti-Semitism, nor was it an exclusively German phenomenon. "Russia was the land of the pogrom; Paris was the city of the anti-Semitic intelligentsia," as Johnson remarked. Yet "Judophobia" was present in Germany from the late 19th century and during the Weimar era many saw the supposed "cultural decay" and "moral decadence" of the time as a product of a Jewish conspiracy to undermine traditional German values. Claims that the conspiracy extended to attempts to dominate and manipulate international capitalism as well as promote Bolshevism were illogical, but formed part of the anti-Semitic outpourings by conservative German nationalists seeking a scapegoat for


▲ The caption on this poster reads, "This person suffering from hereditary defects costs the community 60 000 Reichsmarks during his lifetime. Fellow citizens, this is your money too. Issued by the Department (Office) of Racial policy".

Germany's post-war ills. This "syphilis of anti-Semitism" was particularly evident in the ideology of National Socialism, which, from the beginning, maintained a consistent policy of hostility towards Germany's Jewish population, which numbered around half a million in 1933 – less than 1 per cent of the total population.

**institutionalized**
The programme of state-directed measures, propaganda, and legislation to persecute the Jewish population.

**eliminationist**
Plan to remove the Jews from German society through actions that escalated from officially sanctioned discrimination designed to pressure them to leave Germany, to the most extreme form of "elimination" of the Holocaust, which aimed at the physical extermination of the Jewish population in Germany and Nazi-occupied Europe during the Second World War.

**Institutionalized** and **eliminationist** anti-Semitism characterized the Nazi state; it was, in Goldhagen's view, "the defining feature of German society during its Nazi period". The state's anti-Semitic programme was implemented rapidly after March 1933, with legislation and government support for measures to exclude Jews from German professional, economic, and social life. Over the period 1933–1939, increasing restrictions imposed on the Jewish population in relation to citizenship, interracial marriage and sexual relationships, educational provision, and ownership of businesses were used to coerce Jews into leaving the Reich – no easy task at a time when the Great Depression resulted in immigration barriers being raised by countries that had previously welcomed immigrants.

## Anti-Jewish measures, 1933–1945

- **April 1933** Boycott of Jewish businesses and Jewish doctors and legal professionals.
  Law for the Re-establishment of the Civil Service, excluding Jews (and other "undesirables" such as socialists or those with anti-Nazi views or non-Germans) from government employment.
- **July 1934** Jews not permitted to take legal examinations.
- **December 1934** Jews forbidden to take pharmaceutical examinations
- **September 1935** "The Nuremberg Laws" (the Reich Citizenship Act and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour) depriving Jews of German citizenship and forbidding intermarriage and sexual contact between Jews and "citizens of German or kindred blood"
- **July 1938** Ban on Jewish doctors
- **August 1938** Male Jews required to add the name "Israel" and females "Sarah" to any non-Jewish first names
- **September 1938** Cancellation of qualifications of Jewish doctors
  Jewish lawyers banned from practising
- **November 1938** Kristallnacht: following the murder of a German diplomat in Paris by a young Jewish assassin, attacks made on synagogues and Jewish persons and property. Mass arrest of Jews, their release conditional on their agreement to leave the country and for the Jewish community to pay for the damages occurring during this "pogrom"

  Jewish students forbidden to attend German schools and institutes of higher education

  Compulsory sale of Jewish businesses, part of a process of the "Aryanization" of German business
- **February 1939** Jews forced to surrender all items of gold, silver, and jewellery to the state
- **October 1939** Heinrich Himmler and SS given responsibility for Jewish affairs, followed by the expulsion of Jews from Vienna and, by early 1940, West Prussia. Relocated to German-occupied Poland

- **August 1940** The idea of transporting millions of Jews from Germany and the occupied East to Madagascar abandoned
- **July 1941** Beginning of plans for a "Final Solution to the Jewish Question"
- **September 1941** Jews required to wear a yellow "Star of David" Transporting of Jews to concentration camps and the start of experiments on methods to murder Jews en masse
- **January 1942** Detailed plans for the extermination of Jews drawn up at the Wannsee Conference
- **February 1942** Start of mass executions of Jews in Poland
- **September 1942** Jews, together with gypsies, Soviet prisoners of war and "asocials" given over to Himmler for "destruction through labour" in camps such as Auschwitz (originally established in 1940 but now hugely expanded for "processing" those deemed "undesirable" by the Nazi regime). Other camps, such as Maidanek, Treblinka, Chelmno, Belzec and Sobibor, were tasked with the gruesome process of the annihilation of humans considered unworthy of existence by the Nazis.

  The murder of these "undesirables" resulted in the extermination – the physical elimination – of 6 million Jews alone, as well as Slavs, gypsies and other minorities or groups identified as "social outcasts" and political enemies.

## The Holocaust, 1941–1945

Institutionalized anti-Semitism in Germany was the basis for the attempted genocide of European Jewry (the **Holocaust**) in areas under Nazi control and the occupied territories: a systematic elimination of Jews from the social and economic life of the nation and its territories. For Hitler, as Burleigh pointed out in *Sacred Causes*:

> *The Aryan's maleficent counterpart was the Jew … the negation of the Aryan's God-given properties … allegedly a materialist rather than an idealist, lacking culture-creating capacities – an anarchic, egoistic and individualistic "destroyer of culture".*

**Holocaust**
The systematic, state-sanctioned persecution and murder of 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

In the National Socialist world view, predatory capitalism and Marxism were "the twin offspring" of "international Jewry" and Jews were seen as dangerous for the nation – and, indeed, the world. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler fulminated about the peril of Judaism, and declared:

> *Should the Jew, with the aid of his Marxist creed, triumph over the people of this world, his Crown will be the funeral wreath of mankind … I believe today that my conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty creator, in standing guard against the Jew I am defending the handiwork of the Lord.*

While his attitude to the Jewish population pre-1933 was extreme, it was only after the establishment of the regime that Germany witnessed an onslaught of discriminatory policies and programmes to rid Germany (and later Nazi-occupied Europe) of Jews. Historians have argued the extent to which the scapegoating of Jews was an attempt to rally Germans to National Socialism through a spirit of "negative cohesion", by using the existing suspicion and hostility towards the Jewish community shown by some sectors of the population since the later 19th century. Portraying

the struggle against "the Jew" as a life-and-death struggle allowed Hitler to appeal to the xenophobic tendencies of some and the materialistic interests of others, who envied the fact that such a small Jewish population was so dominant (in proportional terms) in business, politics, and the professions.

The "intentionalist" school of historians of Hitler's Germany emphasized the extent to which Hitler relentlessly followed a consistent aim of exterminating the Jewish population, noting frequent references in *Mein Kampf* to the destruction of "undesirable" elements in the proposed *Volksgemeinschaft*. Conversely, the "structuralist" or "functionalist" school puts forward the case that the savage treatment of the Jews, by the war years, was largely a product of local initiatives by Nazi officials in occupied eastern European lands, who attempted to solve the problem of the large Jewish numbers under their authority by simply liquidating the population.

Mommsen claimed that a process of "cumulative radicalization" occurred among Nazi leaders, who vied with one another to interpret and carry out what they understood to be Hitler's desire to physically destroy European Jewry. The interpretation that, in the Reich, many Nazis in the regime hierarchy would create "their own orders within the spirit of what was required of them" was questioned originally by Kershaw, who talked of the tendency of officials to "work towards the Führer".

The methods to be used to "cleanse" Germany may be a matter of debate, but the desire to remove Jews from the nation was not. Measures from 1933 to 1935 aimed to pressure German Jews to leave the country, by applying economic and social sanctions to deprive them of business/professional opportunities and rights associated with citizenship (including legal rights of residency, for example). Discriminatory legislation was paused somewhat in 1936, when Germany hosted the Olympics, but the tempo of anti-Semitic measures picked up again by 1938, when state-sponsored violence was combined with new legislation to intensify the pressure on Jews to quit Germany.

Between 1933 and November 1938, approximately 150 000 Jews emigrated. In the period after Kristallnacht up to the outbreak of war, a further 150 000 were estimated to have left, as brute force, the Aryanization of business through compulsory purchase of Jewish concerns (large and small) and the exclusion of Jews from mainstream life were increased. In this sense, the "eliminationist" policy of the regime had removed more than 300 000 of Germany's Jewish population of half a million (as of 1933).

The outbreak of war altered tactics for the worse, as German military victories brought not only impressive territorial gains but also large Jewish populations in eastern Europe. Emigration was no longer a possible solution to the regime's "Jewish problem". In 1940 the Nazis debated the desperate idea of relocating European Jewry to the island of Madagascar in what would become a virtual reservation for Jews, but failure to defeat Britain and destroy British sea power meant that by 1941 the scheme was abandoned. A new solution had to be found. It was – with dire consequences for 6 million Jews by 1945.

## The extent of authoritarian control

National Socialism's destruction was the result of external forces. 12 years of rule were ended by the outcome of the Second World War rather than by any significant internal opposition to the Nazi government. Domestic opposition was limited and in some cases its timing – for example, in 1944 – was conditioned not by hatred of the regime but by the fear of defeat and retribution at the hands of the Allied forces, and the USSR in particular.

In this sense, "authoritarian control" can be seen to have been effective in limiting domestic opposition to the regime. While not all Germans wholeheartedly accommodated themselves to the regime, the numbers of denunciations received by the Gestapo show a wide level of compliance with its aim of identifying enemies of the Reich. Germans, among the best-educated people of Western Europe (a "supposedly civilised country", as Geary remarked), submitted to the regime for a variety of motives, including:

- belief in the aims of the Nazis
- fear of the consequences of disobedience
- disillusionment with the previous democratic system and antipathy towards the possible rise of the Left
- gratitude for the material benefits that the Nazis seemed to offer in their social and economic programmes, which offered employment and upward mobility for those who accepted the NSDAP
- pride in Nazi foreign policy which, until 1939 at least, had succeeded in restoring national pride by rejecting the Diktat of Versailles.

For the majority – those not victimized because of their racial, political, mental, or physical status – there was little reason to risk persecution by a system that had "rescued" Germany from economic despair and humiliation.

On 28 April 1939, the focus of a speech that Hitler delivered to the Reichstag was on the achievements of National Socialism under the Führer. For Kershaw and Haffner, such achievements (constantly stressed by Nazi propaganda techniques and through the promotion of a cult of the Führer/Saviour) were appealing not only to convinced Nazis but had "a wide popular resonance" with many sectors of German society. What many Germans did not realize in April 1939 (five months before the outbreak of war in Europe) was that such achievements were not an end in themselves but "merely the platform for the war of racial-imperialist conquest which they were preparing to fight".

Those who did doubt the regime (its ideological basis and practices after 1933) seldom reacted, due to the terroristic nature of the state, and instead entered what has been described as a form of internal exile – remaining silent and detached from any form of political discourse or overt resistance. In this way lay safety. Such compliance produced horrific results not only for the "enemies" of the Nazi ideology, but ultimately for those who subsequently suffered the misery and destruction brought to Germany by a conflict that resulted in German deaths and partition of the nation in the aftermath of defeat.

# Exam-style questions

1 To what extent were constitutional flaws responsible for the collapse of democracy in Germany?

2 When and why did German democracy collapse in Germany in the inter-war years?

3 "The main reasons for the failure of democratic government in Germany in the inter-war years were external rather than internal".

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

4 "Only the Great Depression put the wind into the sails of National Socialism."

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

5 "Hitler was jobbed into power."

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

6 Discuss why internal opposition to the single-party state in Germany (1933–1945) was both limited and ineffective.

7 In what ways, and with what success, did Hitler (after 1933) honour the promises he made relating to domestic issues during his rise to power?

8 Assess the role of each of the following in the rise to power of Hitler:

- the Paris Peace Settlement
- the actions of Weimar leaders, 1930–1933
- fear of the Left.

9 "The coming to power of National Socialism was the result of the distress for which others were responsible."

To what extent do you agree with this statement?

10 Examine the contribution of each of the following to the maintenance of Hitler's single-party state after 1933:

- control of education
- propaganda
- the use of force.

(If you are unable to deal with all three areas identified in this type of question, avoid such a question and seek an alternative if possible.)

11 "Between 1930–1933 the NSDAP was less the party of first choice than the party of last resort in desperate times."

Discuss this claim with reference to the rapid rise in support for the NSDAP.

12 "The NSDAP was at once a symptom of, and a solution to, economic and political crisis."

Discuss with reference to the growth of National Socialism, 1923–1933.

# Evaluating sources

## Question

*With reference to the origin and purpose of John Heartfield's photomontage of October 1932 ('The meaning of the Hitler salute'), assess its value(s) and limitation(s) for an historian interpreting the reasons for the rise of National Socialism.*

## Analysis

This question asks you to evaluate primary source material. For IA purposes, you will have had an opportunity to research the source before answering this question. In exam conditions (Paper 1) this would not be the case – it would be an unseen source. You should aim to write around 300 words for an IA evaluation question.

Analysing the question means breaking it down into its constituent parts. Key words in the question are "origin", "purpose", "value(s)" and "limitation(s)". You will need to:

- **identify** the author/artist – his political views, academic standing, etc.
- give the **provenance** of the source (publisher, place, date and whether it was meant for private or public distribution)
- **briefly** explain its **origins**: this is the historical context – the significance of the date of publication and the circumstances in which it was produced
- **identify** the audience to which it was addressed and its intended **purpose** (overt and possibly covert)
- comment on why the source has **value** for aiding understanding of the rise of National Socialism and say why the source might have **limitations** as an aid to understanding.

Don't:

- simply **describe** the source content
- deal with the values/limitations of the source in relation to its **utility** (usefulness) – i.e. don't say "This source was/was not useful because it had information which did/did not help my investigation." This is *not* source evaluation.
- **claim "bias"/subjectivity/partiality** unless you can produce specific evidence
- **make generic comments** about age/memory lapse of the author, translation problems, etc., unless you can show how this has affected the source's reliability
- **generalize** – claiming for example that all primary sources are reliable whereas secondary sources are less so.

## Sample answer

The photomontage was produced by Heartfield (a KPD member since 1918) in the A-I-Z, a pictorial newspaper and communist publication based in Berlin, with wide circulation, in October 1932 prior to the November Reichstag elections, when Nazi support and membership was falling and that of the KPD rising. The ***purpose*** of the photomontage was to ridicule National Socialism, its slogans, salutes and claims and to promote anti-Fascism in the chaotic situation before the November election. It intended to link Hitler's rise to the support offered by "Big Business" – in line with the Comintern interpretation of Hitlerism as the "last kick of decaying capitalism" – Hitler being portrayed as the recipient of funds by the industrial magnates of Germany.

The source is ***valuable*** as an example of the dogmatic and ultimately disastrous communist interpretation of National Socialism's rise and an example of the early use of photomontage for political propagandizing. A-I-Z readership was sympathetic to such a message already, so in this sense the message was arguably "preaching to the converted". As a KPD member producing for a communist journal run by Willi Münzenberg, a KPD activist and propagandist, the source is ***limited*** in that Heartfield was emphasizing a "party line" rather than examining the wider range of factors behind Hitler's rise, including the failures of the Left. The actual "contributions" (no details being provided) were available to a variety of parties to the right of centre as business sought to insure itself in a troubled political climate against the rise of the KPD in particular. Heartfield, describing himself as an "engineer" rather than an artist despite his work in commercial publishing and theatre-set design, saw his role as influencing opinion in line with current communist interpretations of European fascism. This Moscow-directed view followed by the KPD did not allow for alternative views or factors.

## Examiner comments

This evaluation shows a good understanding of the provenance and the significance of the photomontage as an historical source in relation to the question. It has identified the author and where and when it was printed and made a brief and pertinent comment on the circumstances in which the source was produced. It avoids the temptation to simply describe what can be seen in the photomontage and shows a clear understanding of the source's possible purpose – both overt and covert.

Values and limitations of the source are not focused on utility – i.e. comments about how helpful this was because it provided or did not provide details helpful to the student – neither does it spend time talking about problems of translation of the text. Instead, it tries to indicate the source's value and limitations for understanding the rise of National Socialism – which may be less to do with the influence/importance of business support (still a contentious issue for some historians) than on providing us with an insight into the failings of the strategy of the KPD and its adherence to a policy that ultimately consigned the Party and its members to defeat and exile, like Heartfield himself in April 1933.