

3 HOW WAS HITLER ABLE TO BECOME CHANCELLOR IN 1933?

WHEN ADOLF HITLER joined the German Workers' Party in 1919 it had hardly any members, very little money and no real political programme. All its members knew was that they disliked the Weimar Republic and wanted to make Germany great again, as it had been before the war.

Over the next fourteen years under Hitler's leadership the Nazis moved from being an obscure minority party to being the most powerful party in Germany. In this section you will be investigating how Hitler and the Nazis achieved this transformation.

Hitler and the Nazis

1919

November: Hitler joins the German Workers' Party

1920

Hitler becomes leader of the Party
Renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nazi Party)

1921

Hitler founds the SA 'Sturm-Abteilung' or Stormtroopers) to intimidate opposition parties



1923

November: Hitler tries to seize power – the Munich or Beer Hall Putsch



1924

February: Hitler's trial and imprisonment for leading the Munich Putsch. In prison he writes *Mein Kampf* which puts across his views.
Hitler changes Nazi policy. They now try to win power by democratic means
The Nazis fight their first Reichstag elections. They win 32 seats

1929

October: The Wall Street Crash. Depression follows in Germany

1930

September: Nazis do well in elections. They win 107 seats



1932

July: Nazis become the biggest single party in the Reichstag with 230 seats

1933

January: Hitler becomes Chancellor

You will find that despite the problems facing Weimar Germany, through the 1920s the Nazis actually achieved very little success. It was not until the difficult Depression years of the 1930s that the Nazis made a real impact on Germany.

The timeline below summarises some of the key events in the rise of the Nazis. In Chapter 3 you will examine the most important of these events in greater detail. This timeline should also help you see the story of the Nazis against the wider background of the Weimar Republic which you have already studied in Section 1.

Other events

1919

January: Spartacist Uprising

1920

March: Kapp Putsch



1923

January: Occupation of the Ruhr
The Great Inflation

August: Stresemann becomes Chancellor

1924

April: The Dawes Plan is announced

1925

Hindenburg is elected President
The Locarno Treaties

1929

The Young Plan

How did Hitler become leader of the Nazis?

ADOLF HITLER WAS born in 1889 in Austria. His father was a customs official. He disliked his father but worshipped his mother. His father died when he was fourteen, his mother when he was eighteen.

There is little evidence from Hitler's early life that he possessed outstanding talent or ability. At school he was a failure. When his mother died he went to live in Vienna, and tried to earn a living as an artist. He was very poor and he lived in hostels. At one stage he worked as a builder's labourer, but lost his job when a Jewish trade-union official discovered he was not a member of the union.

During his time in Vienna he picked up many of the political ideas which later shaped the policies of the Nazi Party. In particular he developed his violent hatred of Jews (ANTI-SEMITISM).



SOURCE 1 Hitler (right) and army colleagues during the First World War

Hitler joins the Nazis

In September 1919 Hitler was sent by the army to a meeting of a small, extreme nationalist group called the German Workers' Party. It had only six members and his first impression was not at all favourable.

However, Hitler also found that he agreed with many of the group's ideas. Only weeks later he himself became a member. The leader of the party soon spotted Hitler's talents as a propagandist. By February 1920 Hitler was helping to draft the party's programme (see Source 2).

Hitler and the First World War

By the time the First World War broke out in 1914 Hitler had moved to Munich, and he immediately joined the German army. He was a good soldier, who won medals for bravery. His officers noticed how good a speaker he was. He was given the job of countering enemy propaganda whenever leaflets were showered on German trenches.

In 1918 he was badly gassed and was in hospital when the armistice and the German revolution took place in November 1918.

Germany's defeat in 1918 left him extremely bitter. Like many other soldiers he blamed defeat on the Communists and Jews who he felt had 'stabbed Germany in the back' (see page 18).

After the war he returned to Munich. He was still employed by the army. His job was to run evening classes in political education for the army. He had to check up on the various extremist groups which were flourishing in Munich at that time and if necessary to counter their propaganda.

SOURCE 2 The first four points of the German Workers' Party's programme, 1920. It changed its name to the Nazi Party later in the same year

1. *We demand the union of all Germans in a Greater Germany on the basis of national self-determination.*
2. *We demand equality of rights for the German people in its dealings with other nations, and the revocation of the peace treaties of Versailles and Saint Germain.*
3. *We demand land and territory to feed our people and settle our surplus population.*
4. *Only members of the nation may be citizens of the state. Only those of German blood, whatever their creed, may be members of the nation. Accordingly, no Jew may be a member of the nation.*

Many Germans were living in Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia – a new state created by the peace treaties after the First World War.

The Germans hated the Treaty of Versailles, which they thought humiliated Germany. See pages 16–17 for details. The Treaty of Saint Germain had forbidden the union of Austria and Germany, and moved borders so that 'Germans' in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire were now living in Italy and Poland.

The Nazis wanted to take over *LEBENSRAUM*, or living space, in eastern Europe for the growing German population.

The Jews were very successful in business and commerce in Germany. The Nazis were jealous of their power. Hitler himself had an irrational hatred of the Jews. The Nazis thought only racially pure Germans, called *ARYANS* by the Nazis, could be citizens of the state.

In 1920 the party was renamed the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP or Nazis). In addition to the points in Source 2 the Nazis openly proclaimed their hatred of Communism. They saw the Social Democratic government as a Communist government and they made no secret of their plans to overthrow it when the time was right. They declared 25 Points, some of which are shown in Source 5.

Bavaria was a good base for such a right-wing party. It had a right-wing government, and many ordinary people in southern Germany were opposed to the Social Democrats. Even the Bavarian state government had plans to topple the Weimar government.

The SA

Hitler organised the Nazi Party along military lines. In 1921 he set up his own private army called the SA (*Sturm-Abteilung* or Stormtroopers). They were mostly young men. Some were former members of the Freikorps. They dressed in brown and were sometimes known as the Brownshirts. Supposedly the SA was formed to protect speakers at Nazi meetings from intimidation by left-wing opponents. In practice the SA often started the violence themselves by breaking up meetings of the Social Democratic Party which often ended in drunken brawls.

SOURCE 3 The pledge taken by members of the SA

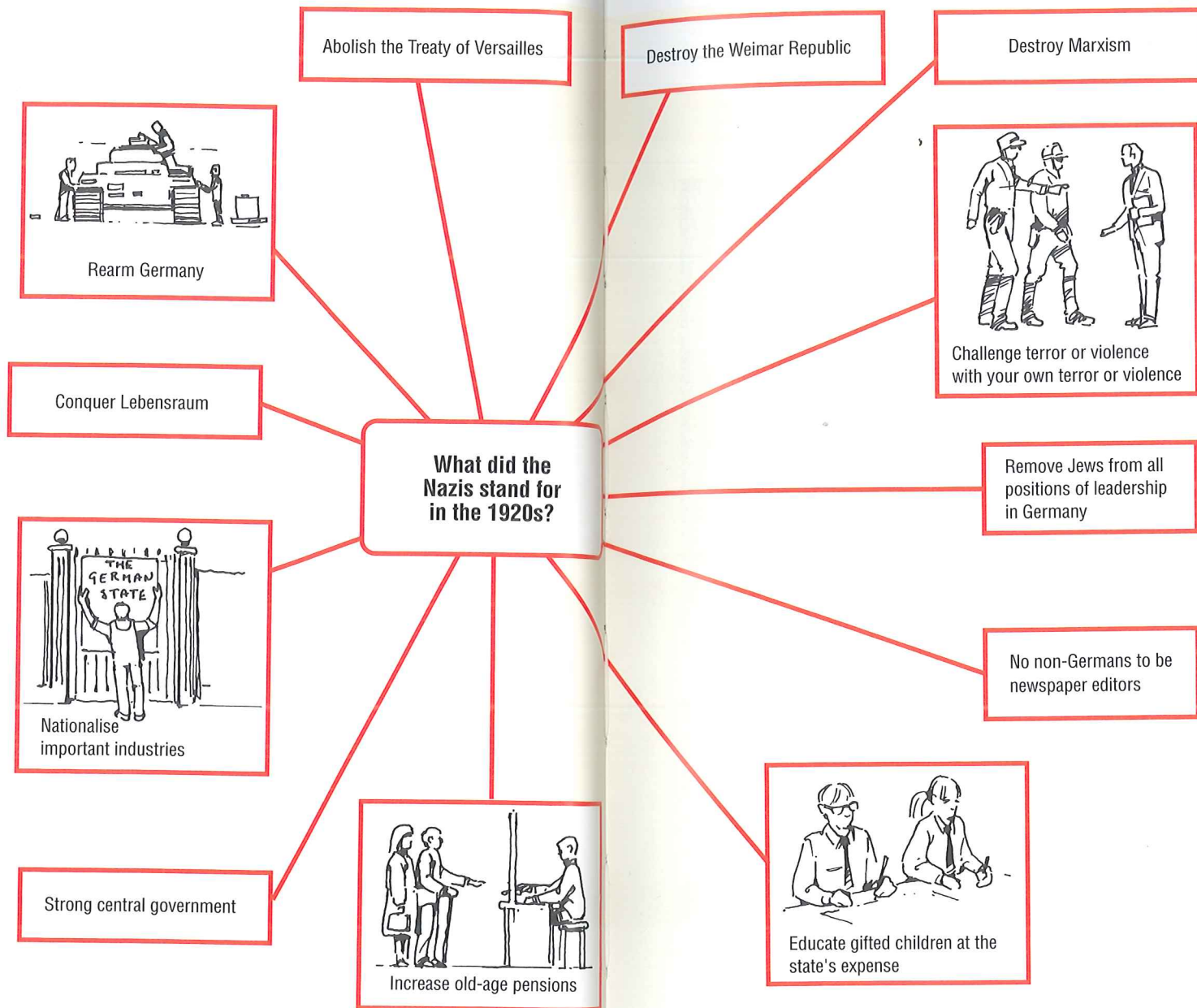
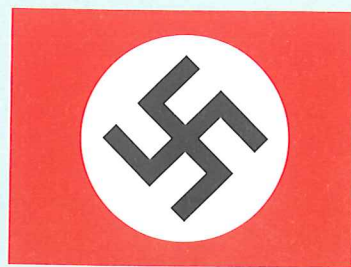
“As a member of the storm troop of the NSDAP I pledge myself to its storm flag: to be always ready to stake life and limb in the struggle for the aims of the movement; to give absolute military obedience to my military superiors and leaders; to bear myself honourably in and out of service; to be always companionable towards other comrades.”

The swastika

Hitler personally designed the Nazi flag, with its symbol, the swastika (see Source 4). The colours red, white and black had also been the colours of Germany's flag under the Kaiser. Very quickly the swastika became the best-known political symbol in Germany.

SOURCE 4 Hitler describing the Nazi flag in 1924

“A symbol it really is! In red we see the social idea of the movement, in white the nationalist idea, in the swastika the mission of the struggle for the victory of the Aryan man!”



SOURCE 5 Nazi ideas in the 1920s

Hitler as leader

By 1922 Hitler was the undisputed leader of the party. He had a powerful, dominating personality. He was intelligent and decisive. Although he was a small man he had great physical presence. He had piercing blue eyes which he would fix on his listeners and he was a charismatic public speaker. When giving a speech he would often arrive late at a meeting, then stand silent for several minutes. He would start softly then gradually build up to a furious finish, driving the audience wild with enthusiasm. He rehearsed carefully for important speeches, even practising his hand gestures and his posture.

SOURCE 6 From a report written by an American diplomat, November 1922

“Adolf Hitler has from the first been the dominating force in the Nazi movement, and the personality of this man has undoubtedly been one of the most important factors contributing to its success. His ability to influence an assembly is uncanny. In private conversation he is a forceful and logical speaker, which when tempered with a fanatical earnestness, made a very deep impression on a neutral observer.”

SOURCE 7 Otto Strasser, one of Hitler's colleagues, remembering the early days of the Nazi Party

“‘Power!’ screamed Adolf. ‘We must have power!’ ‘Before we gain it,’ I replied firmly, ‘let us decide what we propose to do with it.’ Hitler, who even then could hardly bear contradiction, thumped the table and barked: ‘Power first – afterwards we can act as circumstances dictate.’”

1. Read Source 7. What do you think Hitler means by his final sentence?

TASK

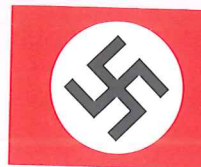
Choose two events in Hitler's life so far that you would regard as turning points. Explain why each event you have chosen was so important.

ACTIVITY

Choose one idea from Source 2 or Source 5. Decide whom in Weimar Germany it might appeal to and design a poster to publicise it.

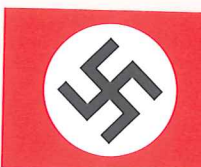
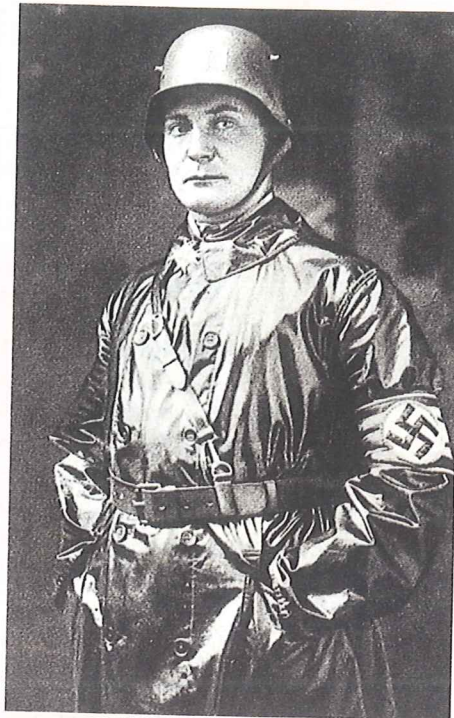
Hitler and his henchmen: the early Nazi leaders

The Nazi Party was dominated by Hitler but he was surrounded by skilled and committed 'henchmen'. The five below went on to play a prominent part in the Nazis' rise to power:



Josef Goebbels
Goebbels was the son of an office worker

in a factory. He had not been able to fight in the First World War because he had a crippled foot which caused him to limp. Although small and physically weak, he was very intelligent, well educated and a brilliant public speaker. He joined the party in 1922. To start with he opposed Hitler's leadership, but then changed his mind and became one of Hitler's most influential supporters. He was appointed editor of the Nazi newspaper *Völkische Freiheit* ('People's Freedom').

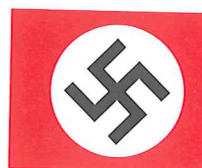


Hermann Goering
Goering came from a middle-class

background. He fought in the airforce in the First World War, shooting down twenty-two enemy aircraft and winning the highest medal for bravery under fire.

He was a loud, swaggering character who was intelligent, witty and charming, but also vain and greedy.

He joined the Nazi Party in 1922, and a year later was put in charge of the SA (Stormtroopers).



Rudolf Hess
Hess had been both a soldier and a pilot in the First World

War. He joined the Nazi Party in 1920. He was a soft, sensitive and humourless man. Hess was not ambitious and did not crave power in the same way as other Nazis did. He worshipped Hitler. In the early days he was Hitler's private secretary and was later responsible for matters of party administration.



TASK

On five pages in the back of your exercise book write the names of each of these Nazi leaders. For each one summarise the important information about their

- background
- character
- work for the Nazis.

As you work through this book add any further information you get about them. Try to find out what happened to each one between 1920 and 1945.

Nazi growth

The Nazi Party was based in Munich but its influence, and Hitler's reputation as a political leader, soon began to spread outside Bavaria to other parts of the country. The Nazis published their own newspaper to help spread their ideas.

In the tense and strained period from 1920 to 1923 the Nazis gathered support among extreme nationalists and anti-Communists elsewhere in Germany. The Nazis were not the only extreme right-wing group in Germany, but in the eyes of their supporters they were the group which seemed most likely to do something about the crisis in Germany. Far away from Bavaria, in a small town in northern Germany, five young middle-class men – two shopkeepers, an accountant, a businessman and a bookseller – got together to form a local branch of the Nazi Party. You will find out what happened to them on page 56.

By 1922 the Nazi Party had 3000 members and the Prussian state government was worried enough to make it an illegal organisation. Hitler was privately warned against attempting a coup in Bavaria. He promised he had no such plans!

ACTIVITY

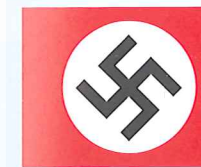
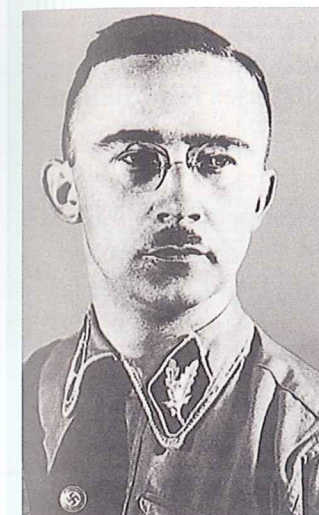
You are a British visitor in Munich and are writing a letter home to your family. Your family know nothing at all about the Nazis, so make sure you explain carefully:

- who the Nazis are
- what they stand for
- what kind of people support them
- why they support them
- what you think of them.



Heinrich Himmler

Himmler fought briefly in the First World War, and before the war had been an agricultural student. As a youth he was frail, timid and clumsy with short-cropped hair and an expressionless face. But he was hard-working and very precise. He even recorded in his diary each time he shaved or had a haircut. He joined the party in 1923. His early posts were as Gauleiter (regional party chief) for various regions.



Ernst Röhm

From childhood Röhm had wanted to be a soldier. He was a captain in the German army during the First World War. This

was a great achievement for a working-class boy – most officers were from the upper classes. He was a tough, brutal, but efficient leader. He had a very violent temper. After the war he joined the Freikorps and helped crush the Spartacist rising. He was a founder member of the German Workers' Party in 1919. He supported Hitler when he took over as Nazi leader in 1920 and he set up and ran the SA for Hitler in 1921.

