

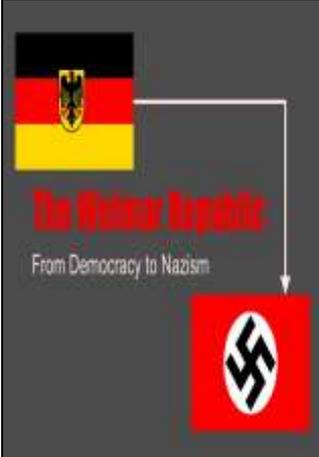
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Legacies of the Great War

The German Legacy

Slide 2

Weimar Republic -1919> 1933



- The Weimar Republic should be of great significance to individuals with an interest in Modern World History and Liberal Democracy.
- In our current Trump / Brexit world it provides a real case study of how a democracy can fail when external challenges threaten and internal forces work actively against it.
- Weimar Germany was an event that occurred at the crossroads of modern world history. At the conclusion of the Great War the German nation was torn between several old ideas and values of the 19th century (tradition, nationalism, militarism and authoritarian government) and those of the modern era (republicanism, liberalism, democracy and human rights).
- Sadly in this instance the old values won out in Germany, and subsequently the German people and those of many other nations throughout the world paid a horrendous price for that democracy's failure.
- Therefore, understanding how and why the democratic Weimar Republic failed is essential for understanding the rise of Adolf Hitler. In 1920 the Nazis were just one of many small groups, filled with disgruntled nationalists and ex-soldiers; their growth, evolution and rise to power was shaped by the political and economic conditions that occurred in the short but action packed fourteen years period of the German Weimar Republic.

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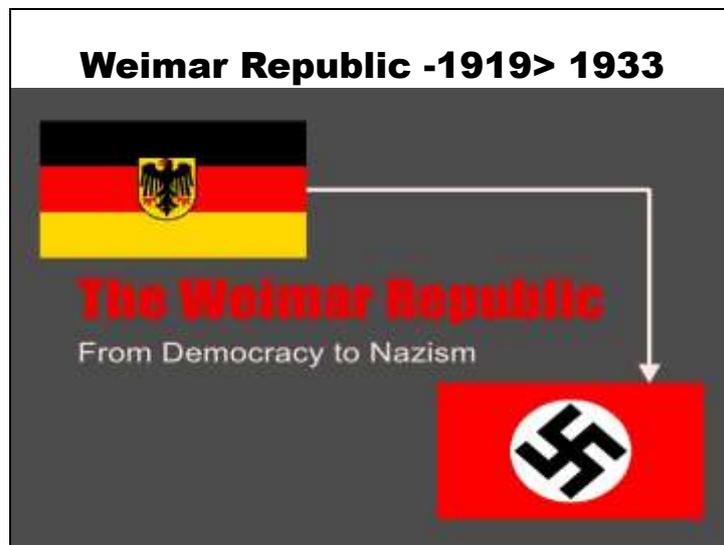
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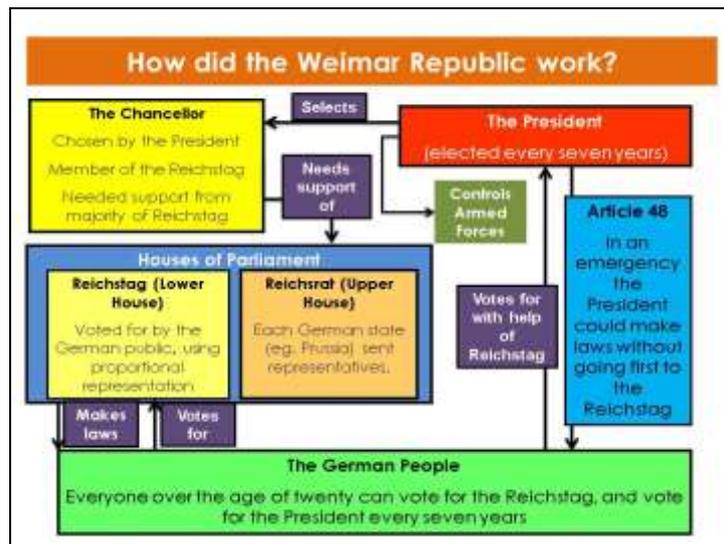
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Notes

Following the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II in November 1918, Germany no longer had an autocratic monarchy, although a basis of a government was provided by the Reichstag (German Parliament).

It was within this vacuum that a bold political experiment took place in the fourteen years between 1919 and 1933. In a nation that had known only authoritarian monarchy and militarism, the men who took control of Germany in 1919 were ambitious reformers, whose objective was to create a modern liberal democracy, wherein they adopted one of the world's most democratic and progressive constitutions at that time.

The name Weimar derives from the city of Weimar, near Berlin, where the members of the Reichstag met in the small town and set up a new Democratic Republican government in February 1919.

In theory the Weimar Republic provided a very good democracy. It had a Bill of Rights to protect the freedoms of the people, and it gave the vote to all men and **women** over the age of 20. The voting system was one of 'proportional representation' – which elected MPs in accordance with the feelings of the people. The people elected the Reichstag, which appointed the government and made the laws. The President of the new Republic, Frederick Ebert, was also elected by the people.

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Review of the various political Isms

GLOSSARY TERMS

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The above slide shows Armed *Freikorps* paramilitaries in Weimar Germany in 1919.

Upon the conclusion to the Great War tens of thousands of German soldiers who had been trained in the German Army and fought on the Eastern and Western Fronts over a period of more than four years finally returned to their homes in the various regions of the German nation.

Many of these men were battle-hardened veterans – significantly, they retained their weapons and they believed that Germany had not been beaten militarily on the battlefield but had been betrayed / ‘**stabbed in the back**’ by politicians and communist influences on the German ‘home front’.

In post war Weimar Germany Freikorps was the name adopted by many of these informal groups of right-wing / nationalist former soldiers.

The Freikorps was effectively a collection of disparate paramilitary gangs / groups that shared the beliefs outlined above.

Members of the Freikorps could be described as conservative, nationalistic, anti-Socialist/Communist and, once it had been signed, anti-the **Treaty of Versailles**.

There were some politicians in the first Weimar government led by Friedrich Ebert who supported the Freikorps, and used units of the corps when it was useful to do so.

For example, the Freikorps was used to put down the Communist Spartacus German Revolution of 1918-1919 and it also crushed the Bavarian Soviet Republic in May 1919.

Also it would be a Freikorps unit, the Ehrhardt Brigade in Berlin that would attempt to overthrow Ebert’s democratic government in March of 1920.

The Weimar government fled to Stuttgart and Ehrhardt put Wolfgang Kapp in charge of the government. In fact, there was very little support for Kapp in Berlin and a general strike brought down Kapp in just two days.

The Freikorps officially disbanded in 1920 but many of its members subsequently joined the fledgling Nazi Party and became the party's original enforcers – what was to become the **SA (Brown Shirts)**, led by a former member of the Freikorps, named Ernst Rohm.

Ernst Röhm was head of the SA (Brownshirts) up to July 1934. Many assumed that Röhm was a loyal member of the Nazi Party who had created the SA to protect Nazi Party meetings and disrupt communist party meetings. However, when the SA grew to form an army with more than three million men, it became a perceived threat to the Nazi party, and Hitler ordered Rohm's arrest and execution.

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Notes

The irony of this photograph is that it shows the deployment of a (captured) British Mark IV Tank.

German society in 1919 was involved in a post war upheaval as various groups of its citizens, many of them returning soldiers with arms, argued violently about which was the best way for the German nation to take going forward.

From a left wing political perspective two of the perceived possible future paths for Germany were either a *social democratic republic* form of government **or** an *authoritarian communist / soviet republic* similar to that which had been established by Lenin's Bolshevik Party in Russia which was supported by the German Communist Spartacus League. Just a few months after the conclusion to the Great War, from 4th to 15th January 1919 the communists initiated a general strike throughout Germany.

The actions of Spartacus were perceived as a threat by the *Social Democratic* government, then the largest party in the German parliament power and a virtual civil war broke out between the two left wing factions.

The Communist Spartacists initially demonstrated against the Ebert Social Democratic government, and widespread and violent clashes between the two factions occurred and were suppressed in Bremen, the Ruhr, Rhineland, Saxony, Hamburg, Thuringia and Bavaria. However after government troops were called out, the demonstrations temporarily subsided.

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Notes

However the Communists carried out a second round of even bloodier street battles in Berlin against the Social Democratic government in March 1919.

On this occasion President Ebert called upon (right wing) *Frei Korps* units to put down the (left wing) Spartacists, in the process of which many of their leaders were murdered (including Rosa Luxemburg).

This event constituted another factor that led many left-wing sympathizers to further disillusionment with the Weimar Government.

A critical outcome of this split between the two left-wing German factions (the Communists and the Socialists) was that two groups that should have been philosophically aligned were instead bitterly divided and would never co-operate again.

In effect this situation created a '*Steven Bradbury*' type scenario where, in the process of knocking each other about, they created a vacuum for Hitler's right-wing Nazi Party to fill.

The Right Wing Putsch March 1920

The Kapp Putsch [1920]

- In March 1920 in Berlin, a group of 5,000 men tried to take over Germany. They were led by a man called Wolfgang Kapp. He was a **right-wing** extremist and a **monarchist**. He despised the Treaty of Versailles.
- In this second uprising against the German government, Friedrich Ebert could not use the **Freikorps** like he had against the Spartacist uprising in 1919. That was because this time, it was the Freikorps that were doing the revolting!
- The Freikorps wanted what Wolfgang Kapp wanted and so they followed his orders and fought against the Weimar Republic.



Wolfgang Kapp



Notes

There was one right-wing rebellion – the Kapp Putsch in Berlin in 1920 – but right-wing attacks on the government took a different form.

Members of the Freikorps could be described as conservative, nationalistic, anti-Socialism/Communism and once it had been signed, anti-the Treaty of Versailles.

Many members of the Freikorps had fought in World War One and had military experience. They did not believe that Germany had suffered a military defeat in World War One and members of the Freikorps were very vocal supporters of the '*stab-in-the-back*' myth that was eventually taken up by the Nazi Party.

Right-wing groups assassinated politicians and set up paramilitary groups which terrorised their neighbourhoods. And when the government tried to bring any of them to court, right-wing judges often exonerated them.

Proportional representation turned out to be a disaster too. It led to the election of many tiny parties, all of whom squabbled amongst each other, so no government could get a majority in the Reichstag – so it could never pass the laws it wanted or that Germany needed.

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Notes

In January 1923 the German government was unable to pay the reparations required under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

In response French and Belgian troops marched into and occupied Germany's industrial Ruhr region, the main centre of Germany's coal, iron and steel production in an occupation that would last more than two and a half years.

The Ruhr occupation was achieved swiftly and methodically. Once French and Belgian troops had crossed the border, they sealed off the Ruhr from the rest of Germany and expelled 150,000 civilians and non-essential workers out of the area.

Some two million German industrial workers remained in the Ruhr and in some cases were prevented from leaving. By July, the French had set up an exclusion zone, restricting traffic in and out of the Ruhr.

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Notes

The occupiers began confiscating raw materials and manufactured goods, which were loaded onto railway trucks and shipped back to France and Belgium – payment in kind for the missed reparations instalments.

The Weimar government's position on the occupation was one of '*passive resistance*'. Behind the scenes, government officials encouraged trade unions to organise a general strike in the Ruhr, to freeze industrial production and hinder French confiscation of resources.

The French responded by bringing in their own workers to operate the mines and began arresting leaders of the resistance movement.

However Weimar's policy not only sabotaged the French occupation, it also undermined the German economy, as production fell and tax revenue from the vital Ruhr region dried up, and unemployment increased.

At the same time the Weimar government promised striking unions that it would continue to pay the salaries of Ruhr workers and civil servants. But the reality was that The German national treasury was basically empty, and the government lacked both the financial reserves and revenue inflow to pay two million striking industrial workers for an extended period.

In order to keep this commitment the Ebert government lurched to its next crisis – this one of an economic nature, whereby it resorted to printing millions of additional banknotes – a policy that led to rampant hyperinflation in 1923.

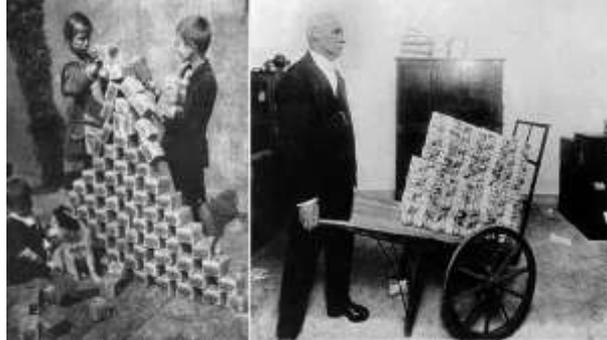
Later in 1923 Charles Dawes, an American banker, was asked by the Allied Reparations Committee to investigate the situation. His report, published in April, 1924, proposed a plan for instituting annual payments of reparations on a fixed scale. He also recommended the reorganization of the German State Bank and increased foreign loans.

**Review of the Economic terms
Inflation & Hyperinflation**

GLOSSARY TERMS

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Hyperinflation - 1923



Notes

Unfortunately the German government's finance officials at that time lacked any understanding of basic economics, and failed to comprehend the enormous social and financial consequences of just printing more and more paper money.

Prices in Germany ran out of control – For example, a loaf of bread, which cost **250 marks** in January 1923 had risen to **200,000 million marks** just six months later in November 1923.

This was **hyperinflation** – a situation where prices rose astronomically and barrow loads of paper money were eventually required by ordinary consumers to purchase basic foods and services.

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**The Golden Age of Weimar under Gustav Stresemann
1923 - 1929**

LO: Who was Gustav Stresemann	The work of Gustav Stresemann
	Who was he? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Credited with recovery of the Weimar Republic after 1923• Right Wing Views – German Peoples Party (DVP)• At first opposed to the Weimar Republic, but changed when he realised alternative was anarchy.• Stresemann took over as Chancellor Aug - Nov 1923• Foreign secretary 1924-29• More able than Ebert

Notes

Despite these enormous problems Germany did not disintegrate. The man most credited with 'saving' Germany was **Gustav Stresemann**, who had taken over as Chancellor from the less than effective Ebert in August 1923.

The most important thing he did was to organise an alliance of the moderate, pro-democracy parties.

This meant that – for the first time – the government could get a majority in the Reichstag and begin to pass the laws it considered necessary.

Stresemann sorted out Germany's economic problems. He called off the strike and started paying reparations.

In response the French and Belgian troops subsequently withdrew from the Ruhr in 1925. He called in the old worthless money and replaced them with a new currency (the '*rentenmark*').

Critically, in 1924 he arranged a US \$200 million loan from the American Vice-President Charles Dawes – a stimulus investment that enabled German industry to get going again.

Stresemann also built new housing, and set up Labour exchanges to pay dole money to the unemployed. He became hugely popular, as the '**roaring twenties**' came to Germany, and the German economy appeared to make economic progress up until the Wall St Crash of October 1929 presaged the onset of the **Great Depression**.

Despite his significant economic achievements much of the prosperity induced by Stresemann was supported by foreign loans, while politically the Weimar state remained weak and unstable, as the extreme right and left factions within the country continued their violent campaigns.

While the left wing parties remained in conflict and effectively neutered each other, on the right there were a number of extreme parties hating Stresemann for paying reparations, and waiting for their chance to get revenge for the Treaty of Versailles by bringing down the Weimar government.

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The Nuremberg Rally 1929



Notes

One of those right-wing parties was the Nazi Party, led by Adolf Hitler. The Nazis had typical right-wing beliefs – they wanted to set up a dictatorship with tough laws, overturn the Treaty of Versailles and unite all the German-speaking peoples.

They also preached the superiority of the 'Aryan master race' (racism), and said they had the right to persecute the Jews (anti-Semitism) and to conquer *lebensraum* ('living space') in eastern Europe.

They hated the Communists, and like many extremist political parties of those times, they had a paramilitary SA wing made up of former Freikorps members, whose role was to attack rival parties and assassinate opposition politicians.

But the Nazis were different to other right-wing parties. After 1923 they did not win many Reichstag seats (they only had 12 in 1928), but during this time they began to build for the future.

They managed to get large amounts of funding from rich German businessmen, including the German steel bosses Krupp and Thyssen, the German car firms Opel and Skoda, and the American businessmen Henry Ford, who believed the Nazis would stop Communism.

They were brilliant at propaganda (organised by Josef Goebbels) and used the most modern technology of the times (radio, newspapers and airplanes) to get their ideas across.

They adopted some ideas from the communists, such as state control of industry, land for the small farmers, better pensions etc, all designed to gain the support of the working classes.

They set up Hitler Youth clubs throughout Germany which were used to indoctrinate young people to believe the Nazi message. Also, Adolf Hitler was a brilliant speaker, and his book – *Mein Kampf* – became a best seller.

Because they were so well organised, one-by-one, the Nazis began to absorb Germany's other right-wing parties.

The Great Depression 1929 -1933



Notes

Following the 1929 stock market collapse on Wall Street and the start of the great depression hit the American economy, American banks quickly began calling in their loans from German firms, which created an immediate follow on downturn in the German economy, and by 1932, more than six million Germans were unemployed.

In 1929 Gustav Stresemann died as a consequence of a stroke, and his effective governing alliance of pro-democracy parties quickly fell apart. The new government could not get enough support in the Reichstag to pass its laws, and had no ideas about to solve the nations depression, other than by cutting wages and government benefits to the unemployed – the worst thing to do in a depression.

The new government could not get the numbers in the Reichstag to pass this legislation, so President Hindenburg (former Western Front identity in the Great War) used **Article 48** to pass the measures by decree.

These new government expenditure cuts caused widespread anger and bitterness throughout the country.

Many workers turned to communism. This frightened wealthy businessmen, so they financed the strongest opponents of the communists – the Nazis.

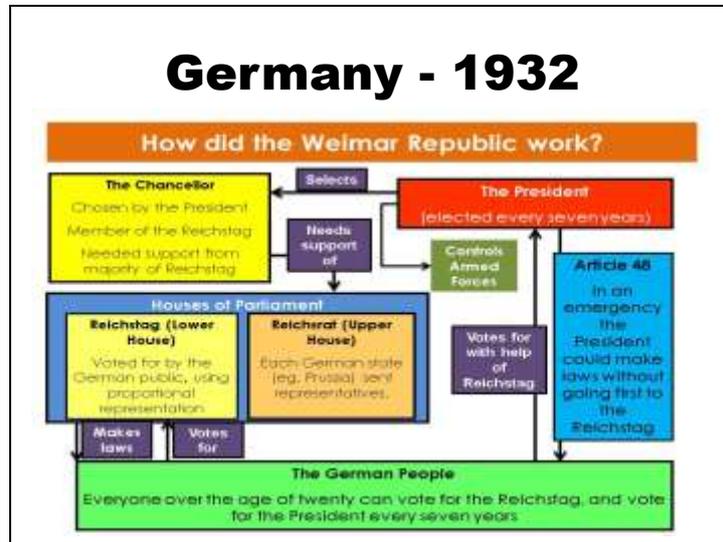
Alarmed by the obvious failure of democracy, many middle-class people decided that the country needed a strong government. President Hindenburg dismissed the ineffective Chancellor Brüning in 1932, and appointed Franz von Papen as Chancellor.

At the July 1932 election, the Nazis won more votes than any other party (230), and Von Papen attempted to gain their support. However, Hitler kept his political distance. He did not want to be identified with a failing government when he had no power to act.

In November 1932, there was *another* election, but instead of getting more seats, By this time, support for the Nazis had dropped, and the Nazi vote fell from 37.3 per cent to 33.1 per cent. But they were still the biggest party.

How the Nazis were handed power in January 1933

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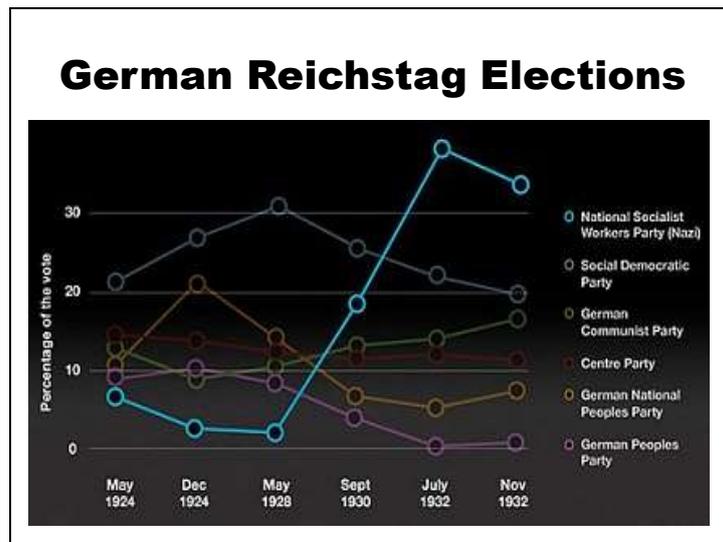
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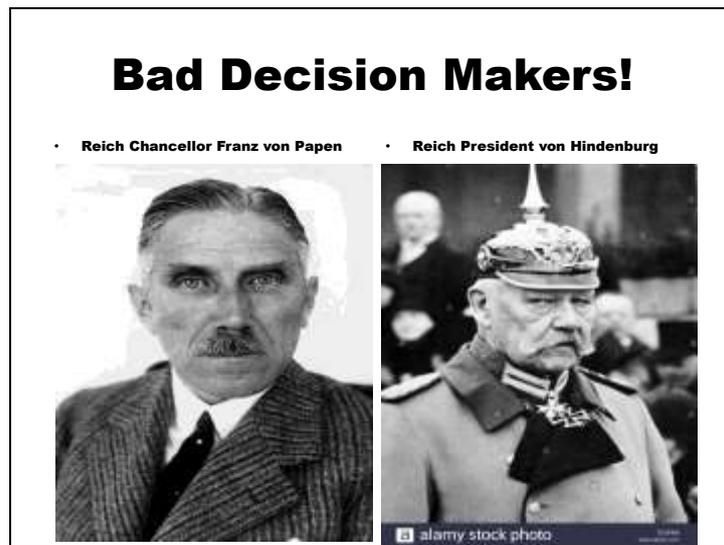


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Notes

But then events transpired to give Hitler power!

The November 1932 elections had left the President Hindenburg and his chief adviser Chancellor von Papen with the same old Weimar problem: the government could not get enough support in the Reichstag to pass any laws.

They needed the support of a big party – and Hitler's Nazis were the biggest party in the Reichstag. They offered Hitler post of Vice-Chancellor (=Deputy Prime Minister) in return for his support.

Hitler refused. He demanded to become Chancellor (= the Prime Minister).

Hindenburg and Papen took a risk – they believed that the government would still be full of their supporters, and that they would be able to control Hitler.

BIG BIG Mistake!

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Hitler was handed power in January 1933



Notes

In January 1933, Hindenburg and von Papen made Adolph Hitler Chancellor of Germany, via a lawful democratic process!

Hindenburg and Papen were wrong – they could not control Hitler.

Within 18 months, Hitler had made himself the dictator of Germany.

How Hitler Transformed Weimar Democracy to Nazi Dictatorship



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Notes

After becoming Chancellor in January 1933 Hitler immediately called *another* election, in an attempt to get a Nazi majority in the Reichstag (lower house).

Just a few weeks later he was assisted in his endeavours by the occurrence of the **Reichstag fire** of February 1933.

Many historians believe this fire was lit by the Nazis themselves – but Hitler accused a mentally challenged Dutch Communist of lighting the fire and then used this as an excuse to arrest hundreds of communist leaders and politicians.

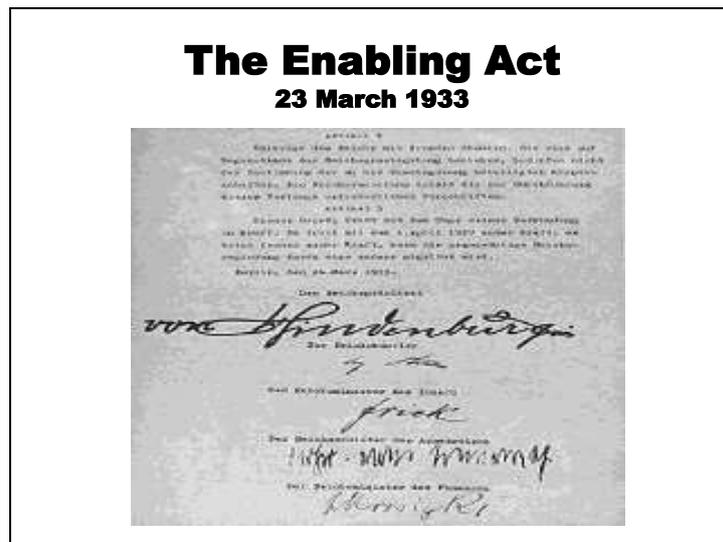
At the same time the Nazis employed the mass media to spread the notion that German 'national security' was under threat and that his government was in danger.

As a result, the Nazis gained 288 seats in that election.

However this outcome still didn't give the Nazis a ruling majority in the Reichstag, so Hitler changed tack.

He then proceeded to arrest the Communist members of the Reichstag and to use the SA to intimidate the other deputies, until the Reichstag passed **The Enabling Act (23 March 1933)**, which would prove to be the death knell for German democracy under the Weimar Republic.

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Notes

The formal title for the Enabling Act was the '**Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich**'

The March 1933 election results, while giving the Nazis greater numbers, did not give them an absolute majority in the Reichstag, and clearly showed that the Nazis were not as broadly popular as Hitler would have liked. Therefore the only way the Nazis could gain a majority of votes for this draconian bill was with the support of other minor parties.

The Communists were no longer a problem because their leaders had been arrested and the party banned after it was blamed for the Reichstag fire.

Hitler hoped that other '**nationalist**' oriented parties could be persuaded to support his bill. However it was the predominantly (Catholic) **Centre Party** that concerned him most, because he recognised that without its support, it would in the future potentially provide a rallying point for those who opposed the Nazis.

So, to win their support he made a deal with them that he would specifically protect the rights that Catholics had in Germany, and would make the effort to foster better relations with the Vatican.

This undertaking was good enough for the Centre's party who subsequently supported the bill into law.

The final vote for the Enabling Act was 444 **for** and 94 **against** – the only members who voted against the act were Social Democrats, despite the fact that they faced potential threats of violence from the many SA Brown Shirts who were present in the chamber when the vote was taken.

With the constitutional being met, the Enabling Act was signed into law by the aging Reich president whose signature can be clearly discerned on the above document.

The Enabling Act Consequences



Notes

In simple terms, by passing the Enabling Act, the Reichstag Deputies allowed themselves to be bypassed in the German law-making process, so that legislation could henceforth be lawfully implemented by Chancellor Adolph Hitler alone.

From that day on Hitler was a legal dictator, and he quickly set to creating the structures and mechanisms that would be the mark of the 10,000 days Reich by eliminating all potential rivals.

In April 1933, the Nazis took over local government and the police, sacked anti-Nazi teachers and professors, and set up the Gestapo, who subsequently sent opponents, Jews, Communists, gypsies, homosexuals, alcoholics and prostitutes and 'grumblers' to concentration camps.

In May 1933 Hitler abolished the Trade Unions, and in July 1933 he abolished all political parties other than the Nazi Party.

In July 1934, Hitler used the SS to murder SA Brown Shirts leader Ernst Rohm together with some 400 of the SA leadership, thus eliminating his potential rivals within the Nazi party.

Then, when Paul von Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler united the roles of Chancellor, President and Head of the Army and declared himself Führer.

The rest is history!

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Youtube: Hitler as Orator – Fatal Attraction (7 Minutes)