

GERMANY 1815-1939

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Chapter 10 : Why did the Nazis achieve power in 1933?

The last chapter ended in 1871 with the unification of Germany. As 'chancellor' of the new Germany, Bismarck concentrated on building a powerful state with a unified national identity. One of his targets was the Catholic Church, which he believed had too much influence, particularly in southern Germany. He also worked to prevent the spread of socialism, partly by introducing

health insurance and pensions. In 1890, Bismarck resigned after disagreeing with the new emperor, Wilhelm II. He retired to his estate near Hamburg and died there on 30 July 1898.

It can be argued that the new Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II took Germany into a world war that he had a major hand in creating. The First World War of 1914 - 1918 changed many things about Europe, and

indeed, the world. How Germany was treated by the victors after the war and how the new German Republic coped with the pressures of post-war political and economic turmoil forms the background to the Nazi's rise to power. It is a fascinating episode of history and much can be learned about how extremists can enter mainstream politics, mainly due to economic decline.

How did the Nazis achieve power in 1933?

There is really two parts to this section; 1) the creation and collapse of the new Weimar Republic and 2) how the Nazis got into power. The two are clearly linked - simply put, had the Weimar Republic succeeded, then the Nazi Party would probably have continued to be a minority party. So the reasons for the economic and political collapse of Weimar Germany created the right environment for Nazi propaganda to take hold.

So keep in mind, all the way through this chapter, this question: *What were the factors that brought about the collapse of Weimar Germany? But also consider what factors helped the Nazis to come to power in 1933.*

After World War I, the German ruler, Kaiser William I, abdicated and fled to Holland. The democracy that governed Germany in his absence met at the town of Weimar. It became known as the **Weimar Republic**. The Republic was weak from the beginning.

Using the textbook, *Britain&Scotland and Germany*, Chapter 10, answer the following:

1) Read pp. 130-131 and copy William Simpson's quote. (Keep handy for essays)

The Weimar Republic - born at a bad time!

1) Read McKichan's bullet points and look back at the timeline. Without knowing too much at this stage, see if you can spot problems for the new post war German government.

What evidence is there to support this view?

1) Read the two paragraphs pp131-132, associated with this sub-heading. Initially it is not clear what point he is making. To help you, think about the following; Germany had been ruled by the *elite*, that is royalty and the landed aristocracy. It was this ruling elite that dragged Germany into the war and, ultimately, lost the war. Sometimes, under such circumstances, the people start a revolution to get rid of the ruling elite - **a revolution from below**. But what happened in Germany in 1918 was that the ruling elite saw the writing on the wall (losing the war and German people wanting political reforms), and cleverly decided to hand down power to the Liberal middle class - **a revolution from above**. This would hopefully stop the people rising up against the ruling elite, ensure the ruling elite still had some control over the changes, hopefully get better peace terms from the Allies, BUT not get the blame for losing the war nor signing the peace treaty!

Now make your own notes on these two paragraphs, pp131-132.

Revolution from below

- 1) What did the workers' and soldiers' soviets want?
- 2) Why did the new (mainly Liberal & socialist) government make a pact with the army?
- 3) What point is historian John Hiden making?
- 4) How does the rest of p. 132 confirm Hiden's quote?

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5) Using the bullet points on p.133, explain why it is true to say that, despite the ‘revolution’, the army and industrialists still had control over the socialist government and the workers.

6) Using the quotes on p.133, give reasons why Ebert, President of the new republic, had no option but to rely on ‘experts’ to help maintain stability in these turbulent times.

7) On p. 134, you can read about the *Spartacist Rebellion*. You can easily find information about this on the net, but at this stage you should keep it the context of the ‘bigger picture’, i.e. why did the Weimar Republic collapse? Essentially, this was a spontaneous uprising by workers in which the communist party (KPD & USPD) joined in. It involved a strike by many workers. The brutal suppression of the rebellion by Ebert’s government, who got the elite soldiers, *The Freikorps* to help, is considered the end of the German revolution.

Now explain why Ebert used the right wing Freikorps to suppress this left wing uprising and what damage did it do to the support Ebert would now get from the communist USPD.

The Treaty of Versailles

You will see a DVD called ‘Make Germany Pay’ which will help with you understanding of this very important factor.

1) Why did the new rulers have to sign the Treaty?

2) Make your own notes on the meaning of ‘stabbed in the back’ and the ‘November Criminals’.

3) Which part of the Treaty regarding the loss of land really angered the Germans? Explain why.

4) Can you think what the long term consequences might be regarding the ‘forcing’ of German speaking people to live in new foreign countries as explained at the top of p. 136?

5) Why did so many Germans now dislike the Weimar republic?

6) What did Hugo Preuss think the new republic was born with? What was he referring to?

7) What is the supposed link between the Treaty and the Nazi’s rise to power in 1933?

8) How was the military dealt with by the Treaty?

9) What was ‘bitterly resented’ by many Germans regarding the Treaty? (Article 231 is the part of the Treaty which claims that Germany started the war therefore have to pay for all the damage it has caused.)

10) What does historian A.J. Nicholls claim was the long term impact of the harsh Treaty?

11) In what way does Preuss support Nicholl’s assessment?

12) John Hidden indicates a different reason which contributed to the collapse of the Weimar. What was it?

13) Copy out Nicholl’s quote which appears under Hidden’s quote on p. 137.

14) Take notes on the textbook’s final assessment on some of the reasons for the Nazi’s rise to power.

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The Problem of German Democracy

- 1) Outline the main parts of the new Weimar Constitution. (Find out what **Proportional Representation** is.)
- 2) Give some thought to how democratic Germany was before and during the Great War. Do you think Germany went too far too soon as regards changing how the country was run?
- 3) Describe the problems of proportional representation. How are these problems made worse during a turbulent time for a country?
- 4) What were the pros and cons of allowing the President powers to suspend the constitution?
- 5) Why did the government want to disband the *Freikorps*?
- 6) How did Wolfgang Kapp get control of Berlin in 1920? (Known as the Kapp Putsch).
- 7) Describe how Ebert's government dealt with Kapp.
- 8) What happened to Kapp and his followers? Did this make the government popular with the people of Berlin?

Let's pause and sum up so far:

The Weimar republic was associated with failure in WWI since it had signed the Treaty of Versailles that had ended the war. Many nationalists believed the republic had sold Germany out to its enemies by ending the war too early. The treaty took territory from Germany and left the country facing crippling compensation claims. The limitations it placed on Germany's armed forces, and

especially the War Guilt Clause that blamed Germany and her allies for starting the war, left many Germans feeling humiliated. For these reasons it was deeply unpopular.

There was no tradition of parliamentary democracy so there was no general support for the new republic.

The ruling Social Democrats were linked to Versailles and nicknamed the 'November criminals' (the armistice to end the war was signed in November 1918). As such they were not trusted by the general public.

Parliament was elected through a system of proportional representation. This meant there was no overall majority and the country was run by coalitions. The result was unstable governments and public suspicion of deals between parties.

From 1919 to 1922, the republic came under attack from both left and right wing factions who demanded radical reforms. This spilled over into violence and unrest between the two rival camps. The government could not control the situation. (BBC Bitesize)

If you want my opinion at this point, I'll tell you that a major reason for the Nazi's gaining power was money. Throughout the 20s, many Germans lost money and savings; the country was in financial difficulties and the government struggled to deal with that; the Treaty destroyed their ability to get back on their feet economically; and to top it all, the Great Depression hit them hard in 1920/30.

It is the economic problems we will now consider.

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The Economic Problems

- 1) (Reparations = financial compensation Germany had to pay as part of the Treaty for causing the war) What problems did the reparations payments cause Germany?
- 2) Make your own notes on the cause of the infamous hyperinflation of 1923.
- 3) Look at, and think about the chart on p. 139. To put into context, imagine you were to buy something today which cost you £80 and then the country went into hyperinflation. Less than a year later the same item you bought would now cost you £4,420 million! Pause to think about the consequence of this. Prices rose every day therefore if you only got paid (or you relied on a monthly pension/investment), then you would be in serious difficulties. Your savings would become worthless but so would your debts! And what about the item you bought only a year ago for £80? What other consequences can you think of?
- 4) How did the government try to deal with the problem?
- 5) Who survived and who suffered?
- 6) Who did the German people blame for the economic crisis?
- 7) Which group of people in particular felt more drawn towards the Nazis?
- 8) What happened in November 1923?
- 9) How was Hitler going to get into power after the failed violent attempt?

Before we go further into Hitler's rise to power, lets sum up:

The Republic failed to pay full reparations to France so the French invaded the Ruhr region of Germany

and took control of key industries and natural resources. This worsened the economic crisis in Germany.

The inflation rate rose so dramatically that the German currency lost virtually all value. Paper money was as good as worthless. This caused many people, especially in the middle classes to fall into poverty. Many never trusted the Republic again.

In 1924 the crisis was brought to an end by the Dawes Plan, which restored the value of the currency. One result of this was to make the German economy dependent on loans from America. When the American Stock Exchange (Wall Street) crashed in 1929, this left the struggling German economy in chaos. Industries failed and unemployment rose to 6 million. Social unrest followed, as people starved. (BBC Bitesize)

It would pay dividends to just pause here and sum up all the reasons you now know that help explain why the Weimar Republic failed to maintain power of the new republic. Think about factors outwith their control; as well as the actions of the government. Consider too, the circumstances under which the new republic was set up. Do this task now before we move on.

How did the Nazis achieve power in 1933?

Despite the failure of the Munich Putsch in 1923, when Hitler tried to seize power by violent revolution, he was able to use his trial for treason to make himself a national figure. He used the publicity to get his ideas published in *Mein Kampf*, his autobiography.

For several years the Nazis were only a small, marginal party, alongside hundreds of others. Over time, however, they became a force to be reckoned with.

The Rise of the Nazis

1) What were the common features of the so-called *volkisch* parties of which the Nazi Party was just one example?

2) What skill did Hitler possess that made him stand out?

Nazi Ideology

The Nazi party policies were deliberately vague so they might appeal to as many people as possible. It was not unusual to find people of both right and moderate-left wing politics joining the Nazis because they agreed with one or more of their policies.

The Nazis were violently opposed to Communism. The Communists believed all private ownership of land and assets was theft. This led many landowners and businessmen to support the Nazis.

Their social policies, such as better pensions and reducing unemployment, appealed to the common man and also many traditional socialists.

The Nazis proclaimed that they would abolish the Treaty of Versailles,

that they felt unfairly punished Germany. This was a popular policy for many Germans.

After losing territories at Versailles, the Nazis wanted Lebensraum (living space) for their surplus population. Bluntly, they wanted more land. (BBC Bitesize)

1) Make some notes on the very brief section on this on p.142.

It is a commonly held belief, (and experience shows) that if a government can keep (or have) as many of the population happily in work and earning a living wage, then they will be elected back into power, whether they performed well or not whilst in government. Some would argue that was what happened with the Thatcher and Blair governments.

Going back to Weimar Germany, the period between 1924-1929 is when the Weimar Republic experienced their 'Golden Era'. At this time, the majority of Germans didn't vote for extreme political parties and generally left the those in charge in office.

I'm of the opinion that if the economy of Germany had managed to stay relatively buoyant beyond 1929, then the Nazi Party may well have just faded away and we would never have heard of Adolf Hitler. Sadly, this was not what happened because of two things: the death of Gustav Stresemann and the Great Depression.

Let's look back at this 'Golden Era' of the Weimar Republic.

How did the Nazis achieve power in 1933?

A Golden Era?

- 1) When was this 'Golden Era'?
- 2) Describe what Stresemann did to end the hyperinflation of 1923 and get Germany back on a similar economic standing to Britain and France by 1927.
- 3) What did Stresemann do to improve foreign relations?

Was democracy in Germany secure by the end of the 1920s?

- 1) Why were these 'lean' times for the Nazi Party?
- 2) Describe the serious problems the government still faced in the 1920s.
- 3) Can you think of a problem of relying on foreign loans to secure your economic recovery?
- 4) What blew away all of the achievements of the Stresemann era?

The collapse of democracy.

- 1) Why was Germany so badly affected by the Wall St Crash?
- 2) Copy Finlay McKichan's quote on p.144.
- 3) Read over Source 10.7 and remember it's there!
- 4) Write down what Article 48 was. (Try p. 138!)
- 5) What did Brüning do and was it successful? (Use some data from Sources 10.8 and 10.9 in your answer)
- 6) How true is it to say that the increasing number of unemployed voted for the Nazis? Explain your answer.
- 7) Which sectors of society did the Nazis gain most of their votes from?

8) Using the Hiden and Fulbrook quotes, explain why some people voted for the Nazis.

Why did the Nazis gain power?

This is an important question and I would like you to construct an extended answer to this. Your answer should mention the following:

- economic factors
- promises and appeal of the Nazi Party
- middle class support
- support from the young
- effective use of propaganda, marches, rallies and parades
- use of new media
- effective election campaigns
- Hitler himself
- The SA or Brown shirts

How far were the Weimar politicians responsible for the collapse of democracy?

- 1) What is Hiden's view on the above question?
- 2) Explain why the parties, the SPD and the KPD can be cited as a reason for the collapse of the Republic.
- 3) Make your own notes on the actions of von Papen and von Schleicher which ultimately saw Hitler enter the *Reichstag*. I would also like to hear your thoughts on the action of these men, especially von Papen.

Final task - Put yourself back to Germany 1933, having just come through the 1920s. Can you honestly say you wouldn't have thought about voting for the Nazis in those 1930s elections?

How did the Nazis achieve power in 1933?

Extra Stuff:

Nazi popularity

For several years the Nazis were only a small, marginal party, alongside hundreds of others. Over time, however, they became a force to be reckoned with.

They came to be seen as the only credible right-wing alternative to the left-wing parties.

Their belief in the supremacy of the German race appealed to nationalists.

The paramilitary groups reminded people of the comradeship they shared as soldiers.

Hitler was charismatic and he won people over by strength of personality.

Hitler's hatred of Jews struck a chord with many people - they were a convenient scapegoat, to be blamed for all Germany's problems.

Throughout the 1920's good organisation, effective propaganda and rallies spread the popularity of the party all over Germany.

When social unrest increased, after benefits were cut in 1930, Hitler used fear of Communism to get support from Hugenberg, an industrialist who owned a chain of newspapers, and Thyssen, a steel manufacturer. They, and other industrialists, formed the Harzburg Front which helped finance the Nazi election campaigns in 1932-3 to ensure the Communists were defeated.

At the July 1932 election, the Nazis won more votes than any other party. Hitler was offered political office in a

coalition with two other politicians, von Papen and von Schleicher. He refused. He would not share power.

After the November 1932 elections, Hitler refused the chancellorship because President Hindenburg tried to limit his powers. When he accepted the chancellorship in January 1933, he was one of only three Nazis in a Cabinet of eleven. The Vice Chancellor, von Papen, thought he could keep Hitler under control.

The Reichstag fire

In February 1933, the German parliament, the Reichstag, was burned down. The Communists were blamed. Hitler expelled the Communists from parliament and enforced a state of emergency where all civic freedoms were suspended. The Nazi party now had complete control of Germany's army, its police force, its government and its economy. Hitler was in power.

(BBC Bitesize)

Links:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/apps/ift/scotland/learning/learningzone/showrecord?Id=2436>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/apps/ift/scotland/learning/learningzone/showrecord?Id=2433>

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