



# REVISION – NAZI GERMANY



## *The Nazi take-over (1933-1934)*

**MATERIAL:** Old Morris (HL) = 286-302 Newest Morris (SL) = 297-327 Traynor = 171-202/252-305

### **FACTS NAZI TAKE-OVER:**

- **Chancellors and Governments from June 1928 to January 1933;**
  - Hermann **Müller** (SPD) 1928 June 28<sup>th</sup> – 1930 March 27<sup>th</sup> (Coalition Government – the “**Grand Coalition**”; SPD, DDP, Centre, DVP)
  - Heinrich **von Brüning** (Centre) 1930 March 30<sup>th</sup> – 1932 May 30<sup>th</sup> (authoritative (or authoritarian) democracy - von Brüning mostly ruled by the use of presidential decree - §48)
  - Franz **von Papen** (Centre right-wing – forced to leave the party two days after he accepted the appointment as Chancellor against the will of the party) 1932 June 1<sup>st</sup> – November 17<sup>th</sup> (“*cabinet of barons*” or “*cabinet of monocles*”: authoritative (or authoritarian) democracy. All decisions taken by the use of presidential decree - §48)
  - Major General Kurt **von Schleicher** (no party) 1932 December 2<sup>nd</sup> – 1933 January 28<sup>th</sup> (authoritative (or authoritarian) democracy. All decisions taken by the use of presidential decree - §48): \_\_\_\_\_

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### ○ **THE LEGAL REVOLUTION**

- Adolf Hitler had been appointed German Chancellor on the 30th of January 1933. He was the head of a coalition government where the Nazis were the minority. Franz von Papen was convinced that he and the other conservatives in the government would be able to control Hitler and the other two Nazis (Wilhelm Frick; Minister of Interior and Hermann Göring; Minister without Portfolio). Just like Brüning and von Papen had done before him Hitler called for fresh elections. They were going to be held at 5 March 1933. This final “democratic election campaign” was violent. Big business donated about 3 million marks to finance the Nazi election campaign. At the same time the Communist Party meetings were banned and the election rallies of the Social Democrats were broken up by the SA. They also disrupted the meetings of the Catholic Centre Party. 50 anti-Nazis and 18 Nazis were killed in street clashes during the campaign period. Hitler was convinced that he would win a landslide victory with absolute majority (2/3 of the seats). Meanwhile he prepared for the election by using his new power to better the “odds”;
  - February 4th 1933: **Decree against press and meetings...** The government released a Decree against newspapers and meetings that “abused or treated with contempt institutions, bureaus or leading officials of state” or broadcasted “false information”. The new decree was deliberately vague...
  - February 1933: **SA leaders take over the Prussian police forces...** As the Minister of Interior in Prussia Göring was responsible for the police forces. He made an unofficial purge list of Police Officers and Government Officials. In Prussia key Police Chiefs were replaced by SA leaders...
- **REICHSTAG FIRE (February 27th 1933):** There are different theories about who or what started the fire in the German Reichstag;
  - 1. The fire was planned by Göring and Göbbels with the approval of Hitler; the fire was started by the SA who then set up van der Lubbe as a scapegoat; the motive was to use the fire as “proof” that the Communists were planning an uprising. Therefore the Nazis could clamp down on them before the election in March.
  - 2. The fire was started by the Communist Party as part of an armed uprising; the fire was started by several people including van der Lubbe; the Nazi leadership were taken by surprise but then quickly set about containing the Communist uprising.

- 3. Van der Lubbe acted on his own; he did not meet anyone else in the Reichstag and the fire was not part of a wider Communist plot; however the Nazi leadership were so alarmed that they imagined the Communists were trying to overthrow the Government
  - Though the important question was not "*who started it?*" but rather "*the political use made of it by the Nazis!*"
- **EMERGENCY DECREE (February 28th 1933):** The day after the fire the government introduced an emergency decree "*Emergency Laws for the Protection of People and State*". This authorized the government to take charge of law, order and security when the situation demanded it; and order death or imprisonment for a series of political offenses.
  - March 1<sup>st</sup> 1933: **The first law against the independence of the Federal States** (Länder). The little power they had was to a high degree passed towards the central government.
  - March 5<sup>th</sup> 1933: **Election.** The election was a disappointment for NSDAP. They expected a landslide victory and receiving absolute majority in the Reichstag (2/3 majority was necessary to change the constitution. NSDAP received 43.9%). NSDAP got support from the German National People's Party and together they held the majority of the Reichstag with 16 seats. Since Hitler couldn't win the majority through a democratic election he started to create an "**Enabling Bill**" that would transfer full powers to the Chancellor the next coming 4 years...
- **DAY OF POTSDAM (March 21st):** To prepare for the passing of the Enabling Act Göbbels arranged a grandiose ceremony to celebrate the opening of the Reichstag. In the presence of President Hindenburg, the Crown Prince (the son of Wilhelm II) and many of the army's leading generals Hitler aligned National Socialism with the forces of the old Germany. Two days later the new Reichstag met to consider the Enabling Bill...
- **ENABLING BILL (23rd 1933):** When the Reichstag met the Communist deputies (who were not already in prison) were refused admittance. SA surrounded the building and intimidated the deputies of other parties, especially SPD... The Nazis needed 2/3 majority to pass the bill. In a speech inside the Reichstag Hitler promised to respect the rights of the Catholic Church and uphold religious and moral values. In the end only SPD voted against the proposition and the Enabling Bill was passed by 444 to 94 votes. Within a few weeks Hitler had legally dismantled the Weimar constitution. The way was now open for him to create a one-party state!
- **CO-ORDINATION (GLEICHSCHALTUNG)** The process towards Nazi domination over Germany was called Gleichschaltung (co-ordination), a process designed to bring the nation under total Nazi political control.
- **ABOLITION OF THE FEDERAL STATES (April 1933):** By two different laws the Nazi-dominated state governments enacted legislation without reference to the provisional parliaments (Landtage) and the second one created 18 Reichstatthälter (Reich governors) often the local party Gauleiters, with full powers. By this act Hitler dissolved 17 state governments (diets). The only exception was the one in Prussia which was already in Nazi hands. In January 1934 the Landtage were abolished and the federal governments and governors were strictly subordinated to the Ministry of Interior. This meant that the federal principle of government was dead...
  - April 7th 1933: **The Law of the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.** This law enabled the government to dismiss any civil servants who were "unsuitable" or not of "Aryan descent". The civil service was to be purged of Jews and political opponents.
  - April 7th 1933: **The Law on the Admission to the Practice of Law.** This law restricted Jews from joining the legal profession.
- **DESTRUCTION OF THE TRADE UNIONS (May 1-2 1933):** At Göbbels initiative Hitler declared May 1st the Day of National Labor, a paid national holiday. The next day the Nazis occupied union offices throughout the country. Key union officials were arrested and taken to labor camps. The Nazis announced that henceforth there would be only one union - the **German Labor Front (DAF - Deutscher Arbeitsfront)**. The Nazis' act of force took place without any legal sanction...

- **DISSOLUTION OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES (June-July 1933):** The Communist Party was already more or less dissolved after the Reichstag Fire. At the 22nd of June 1933 SPD was banned. The German National People's Party followed at the 29th of June. On July 5th the Centre Party dissolved itself. **On 14th of July a new law was passed that declared that the NSDAP was the only legal party in Germany.** Any separate political activity would result in imprisonment for up to 3 years...
- Now the NSDAP controlled the political life of Germany. Still they had failed to curtail the role and influence of Christian Churches, the army and the big business. Some parts of the party now wanted to extend the co-operation to these areas. This led to a conflict within the party...
- **THE NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES:** In June 1934 President Hindenburg and General von Blomberg gave Hitler an ultimatum; **Deal strongly with the SA (Sturm Abteilung – “Stormtroopers”) or the army will take the power (“Operation Hummingbird”)**...
- **AIMS OF RÖHM AND THE SA:** The SA tended to represent the populist, anti-capitalist, left-wing of the Nazi Party. They placed much more emphasis on the socialist elements of the Party program than Hitler ever did. SA had played a vital role in the years of struggle by winning the political battle in the streets. Ernst Röhm, the leader of the SA, and his troops (about two and a half million “committed” Nazis) were disappointed by the limited personal benefits they received when NSDAP took over Germany and they were very critical against the compromises the regime made with the conservative establishment. Röhm and SA called for a second, more radical revolution, against the forces of the old German establishment. Röhm said in an interview early 1934 that the Nazis had *“to produce something new”* - - - *“The generals are a lot of old fogeys. They never had a new idea... I'm the nucleus of the new army...”*
- **AIMS OF THE ARMY:** SA and Röhm's plan of a second, more radical revolution worried the army who saw their traditional role and status being directly threatened. Hitler needed the support of the army; they could unseat him from his position of power. They were also the only ones that possessed the military skills which were vital to the success of Hitler's foreign policy aims. In 1934 the problems were more acute since it became apparent that President Hindenburg did not have much longer to live. If Hitler wanted to assume the presidency without any opposition and avoid an election it was necessary to secure the army's unqualified backing. This could only be done with the elimination of SA and their leaders...
- **THE PURGE (June 30<sup>th</sup> 1934):** Although there are now written evidence it is known that Hitler and the army generals met on the battleship Deutschland in April 1934. Two months later President Hindenburg and general von Blomberg gave Hitler a final ultimatum; **“Deal strongly with the SA or the army will take over”**. On the 30th of June 1934, the **“Night of the Long Knives”**, Hitler eliminated the SA as a political and military force once for all. Röhm and the main leaders were shot by members of the SS – although the weapons and transport were provided by the army! A few other people were killed during this night; General von Schleicher (former Chancellor) and Gregor Strasser (the leader of the socialist/anti-capitalist wing of the Nazi Party). About 400 people were altogether murdered during the night... Hitler obviously had the support of the army leadership and the President. He also had the support of Göring (in charge of the Gestapo – Geheime Staatspolizei, the “secret police”) and Himmler (who was in charge of the SS). Now SS became a major rival to the army officer class within the hierarchy of the Nazi state!
- **DEATH OF HINDENBURG (August 1st 1934):** When Hindenburg died on August 1st Hitler was able to merge the offices of Chancellor and President. He now took the official new title of Führer. Now the army had to swear an oath of personal allegiance to him as Supreme Commander of the Armed forces and head of the German state! At a referendum August 19th Hitler was given the power as absolute dictator with 38 million votes against 4.25 million.