

History IGCSE

Course plan

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Sample of the IGCSE History Course from Section 2

Topic 2

The Nazi breakthrough 1929–33

Introduction

The Nazis won only 12 seats in the Reichstag elections of 1928. Four years later they gained 230 seats and were the largest party in the German Parliament. This breakthrough was due to the impact of the Great Depression on Germany, together with the appeal of Hitler and the Nazi Party.



You will probably need 2 hours to complete this topic.

Objectives

When you have completed this topic you should be able to:

- outline the impact of the Great Depression on Germany
- describe how democratic government collapsed in the years 1929–32
- explain how Nazi propaganda won increased support
- identify who supported the Nazis
- explain how the political intrigues of 1932–3 brought Hitler to power.
- The Great Depression
- In 1929 the US stock market crashed. This led to a worldwide depression which badly affected Germany.

Economic crisis

Germany's recovery after the hyperinflation of 1923 depended very much upon American loans. In October 1929, disaster struck the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street. The value of shares collapsed following a few days of wild speculation. Many business people were ruined. The Americans had no option but to end their loans to Germany and demand repayment of existing loans. This destroyed the whole basis of the German recovery. German trade particularly suffered. To make matters worse, most other countries in the world also suffered a financial **depression**.

Table 2.1 Unemployment in Germany 1928–32

Year	Number unemployed (millions)
1928	1.8
1929	2.9
1930	3.2
1931	4.9
1932	6.0

The suffering seemed particularly bad because the German people had so recently experienced prosperity. Many still remembered the hyperinflation of 1923 and felt doubly bitter towards the Weimar Republic. They were now more prepared to listen to the promises of extremist parties such as the Nazis and the Communist Party.

Political crisis

The Great Depression showed up the weaknesses in the Constitution and brought about a political crisis that led to the downfall of democracy. Germany needed a strong government and leader in 1929 to lead them through their economic problems. However, Stresemann died just before the Wall Street Crash. Centre Party leader Heinrich Brüning became Chancellor of the coalition government on 30 March 1930.

The two leading parties in the coalition government, the Centre Party and SPD, fell out over how to respond to the Crash. The

leader of the SPD, Hermann Müller, refused to agree to cuts in unemployment benefit which the Centre Party believed were necessary. Brüning and the Centre Party no longer had a majority in the Reichstag. The only way Brüning could continue to rule was to ask President von Hindenburg to use **Article 48** of the Constitution. This meant that laws could be issued under emergency powers rather than having to go through the Reichstag. Von Hindenburg agreed and democracy effectively ended in Germany in 1930. Between 1930–2 the Reichstag met less and less often and became increasingly more helpless.



Go to the link below to find out more about how the Great Depression affected Germany (4:52):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kyA6UqtVhP8>

Nazi activities 1929–32

During this period Hitler and the Nazis gained increasing support. This was due to several reasons.

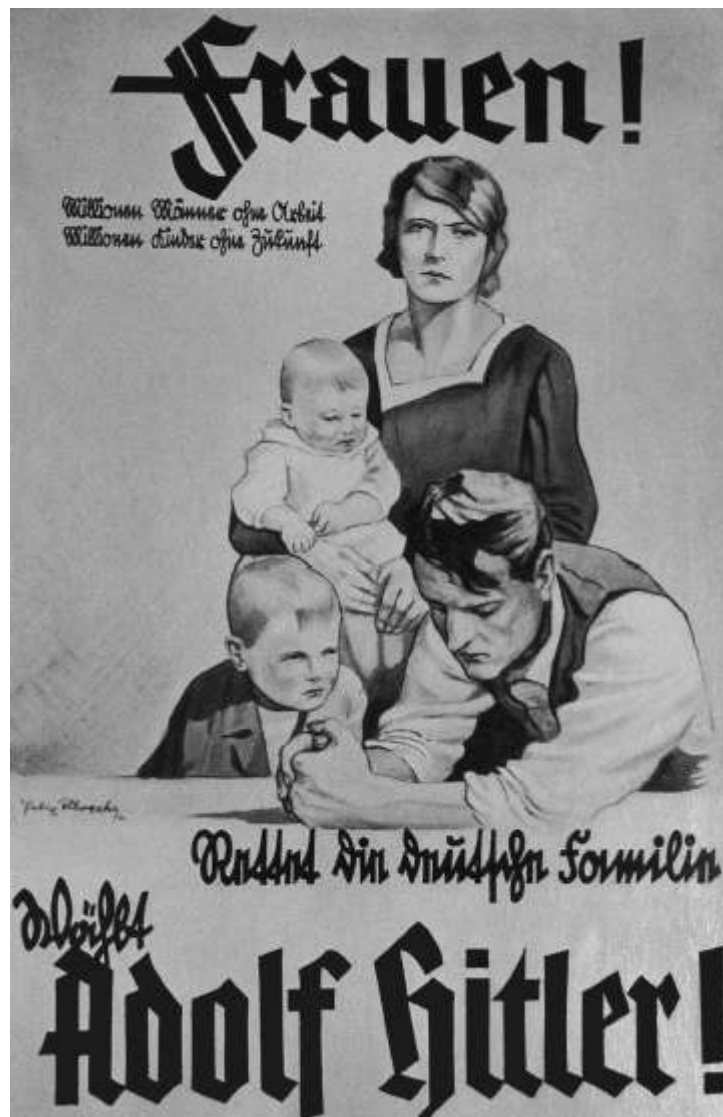
Nazi propaganda

Josef Goebbels was in charge of **propaganda**. He used every possible method to get the Nazi message across and carefully trained local groups in propaganda skills. The Nazis knew that their anti-communist stance was very popular and used propaganda to further whip up fear and hatred of the communists. They used:

- posters and pamphlets
- eight Nazi-owned newspapers
- mobile units to organise entertainment and speeches in different areas
- stirring mass rallies using music, lighting and banners as a backdrop to Hitler's speech-making
- radio, for the first time.

The Nazi message was carried to every town and home in Germany. During the 1932 presidential campaign, Goebbels chartered planes to fly Hitler all over Germany in order to speak to four or five rallies a day.

Source A



(© Philip Sauvain Picture Collection)

Figure 2.1 A 1932 election poster. The text at the top reads 'Women! Millions of men without work. Millions of children without a future. Vote Adolf Hitler!'

Activity 1

(Allow 5 minutes)

To whom would this poster (Source A) appeal?

This piece of propaganda would have a wide appeal to German women, especially those with husbands and sons who were out of

work and those with children who were looking to the future. It cleverly shows the depressed, out-of-work German father and husband.



For some examples of pre-1933 Nazi propaganda, go to:

<http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/pre1933.htm>

The Nazi organisation and programme

The Nazi Party had been reorganised in the mid-1920s. Many Nazis had been soldiers in World War I and were experienced in teamwork, obedience and discipline. The local workers were well trained and motivated. They had skilled leaders at almost every level.

The Nazi programme appealed to many different groups in Germany. Hitler was very flexible. If the Party found an idea was losing support, he would change it. For example, the Nazis spoke in favour of nationalisation (the state taking over control) of industry. When they found how alarmed the industrialists were they quickly dropped the idea. If all else failed, the Nazis went for vague promises: they 'would make Germany great again'. Some promises/slogans, however, gained widespread support.

- By blaming the Jews for Germany's problems, Hitler provided people with a scapegoat and united Germans against outsiders.
- To the depressed Germans, Hitler offered the possibility of a powerful Germany both at home and abroad.
- To the unemployed, Hitler promised work.
- To the employers, Hitler restored profits.

There was something for everyone in the Nazi programme.

Powerful supporters

Hitler persuaded powerful industrialists that he would prevent the communists from taking power and would restore the German economy. As early as 1929, Alfred Hugenberg, leader of the German Nationalist Party and a wealthy newspaper owner, worked with Hitler in attacking the Young Plan. Hugenberg gave the Nazis access to his media empire, especially his cinemas.

Another industrialist, Fritz Thyssen, explains how he supported the Nazis:

Source B

I have personally given altogether one million marks to the Nazi Party. It was in the period 1929–32 that the big industrial corporations began to make their contributions. In all, the amounts given by heavy industry to the Nazis may be estimated at two million marks a year.

(Industrialist Fritz Thyssen)

Hitler's qualities

Hitler himself did much to win support for the Nazi Party. Posters and rallies built him up as a superman. Hitler developed his speech-making skills still further. He wore spectacles to read but refused to be seen wearing them in public and so his speeches were typed in large print. The campaigns focused around his personality and his skills.

Source C

As the spirit moves him, he is promptly transformed into one of the greatest speakers of the century. Adolf Hitler enters a hall. He sniffs the air. For a minute he gropes, feels his way, senses the atmosphere. Suddenly he burst forth. His words go like an arrow in their target. He touches each private world in the raw, telling each person what they most want to hear.

(Otto Strasser, a Nazi who disliked Hitler as a person, writing about his qualities as a speaker)

Activity 2

(Allow 10 minutes)

- 1 What does Source B tell us about the growth of the Nazi Party?
- 2 Does Source C support Source B about the reasons for the growth of the Nazi Party?

- 1 Source B suggests that the growth of the Nazi Party was due to the support of big business whose owners were donating large sums of money.
- 2 There is little support. Source B suggests that the growth was due to the financial support of big business, with donations of millions of marks. On the other hand, Source C suggests it was due to the personal qualities of Hitler, whose speeches were able to inspire those who attended his meetings and rallies.

However, Source C does support Source B in that the support of big business was partly due to Hitler's personal appeal.

The SA and violence

By 1932 the SA numbered 600,000. The SA's violent attacks on rival politicians and political meetings helped the Nazis by:

- disrupting their opponents' meetings
- attracting many young, unemployed and disaffected people who admired the discipline and fighting qualities of the SA.

Support across society

Hitler and the Nazis won support from many different groups in German society.

Source D

Table 2.2 A comparison between working-class and middle-class membership of the Nazi Party in 1930

Category	% of Nazi Party	% of German society
Working class	28.1	45.9
Middle class:		
White-collar workers	25.6	12.0
Self-employed	20.7	9.0
Civil servants	6.6	4.2
Small farmers	14.0	10.6

Source E

In the residential suburbs the middle classes supported the Nazis. They seemed most threatened by the left-wing parties. They had most to lose from a communist takeover and felt let down by the Weimar Republic.

(From Cloake, J A (1997) *Germany 1918-45*)

Activity 3

(Allow 10 minutes)

- 1 According to Source D, from which group did the Nazis receive most support?
- 2 Why was this, according to Source E?

- 1 According to Source D, the main Nazi support came from the middle classes consisting of white-collar workers (office workers), the self-employed, civil servants and small farmers.
- 2 This was because, according to Source E, they felt threatened by the rise of communism ('left-wing parties').

Study hint

Take care when interpreting numerical data. A quick glance at the table above suggests that most Nazi support came from the working classes. However, you have to take into account the fact that the working class made up nearly half the population. In fact, support for the Nazis was proportionately greater in the middle classes, relative to their numbers in society.

Hitler comes to power 1932–3

On 30 January 1933, Hitler was invited by President von Hindenburg to become Chancellor. This was due to a series of developments during this period.

Presidential elections, March 1932

Hitler challenged von Hindenburg for the presidency. Although Von Hindenburg won 19.4 million votes, Hitler's own position was strengthened by winning 13.4 million votes. His campaign provided much-needed publicity for Nazi ideas.

The use of Article 48 meant Germany was now run essentially as a 'presidential government', exposing President von Hindenburg as a weak and frail president who by now was 83 years of age. He relied heavily on advisors, who were mostly extreme right wingers and

opposed the Weimar Republic and its democracy. The most important and influential of these was General Kurt von Schleicher who saw in the economic crisis a means to destroy democracy. It was he who advised von Hindenburg to appoint Heinrich Brüning as Chancellor, believing that Brüning, a well-known figure in the Reichstag since 1924, was reliable and a conservative.

Fall of Brüning, May 1932

Brüning's government could not solve Germany's economic problems as unemployment continued to rise. Brüning became personally unpopular as he increased taxes and reduced unemployment benefit. General von Schleicher advised von Hindenburg to get rid of Brüning, who was replaced by Franz von Papen. This appointment was seen as surprising as von Papen had little or no experience in government, was seen as very right wing and was barely known to the public. However, for von Schleicher this appointment was useful. Von Schleicher increasingly believed that Germany should be run as a presidential dictatorship with the support of the army. He saw the increased support and popularity for Hitler and the Nazis and believed that von Papen and Hitler could work together. The mass support the Nazis enjoyed would mean that a presidential dictatorship would have the appearance of popular support



Go to the link below for further information on von Papen:

<http://spartacus-educational.com/GERpapen.htm>

Reichstag elections, July and November 1932

Von Papen hoped to win enough seats to strengthen his position in the Reichstag. Instead, the elections were a triumph for the Nazis who won 230 seats. It was the largest single party but did not have an overall majority in the Reichstag. Von Hindenburg disliked Hitler, seeing him as a 'trumped-up corporal'. He refused to appoint Hitler as Chancellor and re-appointed von Papen. However, Hitler refused to cooperate with von Papen.

Source F

The President asked Herr Hitler whether he was prepared to enter government under the Chancellorship of Herr von Papen. Herr Hitler replied in the negative. He demanded that the President should make him Chancellor with complete control of the State. The President refused.

(Hitler and von Hindenburg in conversation in August 1932)

Von Hindenburg decided on another election to try to get increased support for von Papen. This was a bad election for the Nazis. They won 196 seats, 34 less than in July due to:

- continuous campaigning, which meant they were running short of funds
- the thuggery and intimidation by the SA, which had begun to lose them support.



If you can, watch this video clip on Hitler as orator – ‘The Fatal Attraction of Hitler – Orator’ (7:54):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-grtEk9oBAU>

Hitler becomes Chancellor, 30 January 1933

Once the Nazis had become the largest party in the Reichstag, political intrigue played a very important role in making Hitler Chancellor.

General von Schleicher stopped supporting von Papen. Schleicher warned von Hindenburg that there would be Nazi and communist uprisings if von Papen continued in office. Von Schleicher persuaded von Hindenburg to make him Chancellor. However, von Schleicher’s government was also unable to control the Reichstag. On 28 January, having failed to win support in the Reichstag, von Schleicher resigned when von Hindenburg refused to support his government with rule by decree.

Anxious to regain power, von Papen struck a deal to make Hitler Chancellor, with himself as Vice-Chancellor. The moderate parties would hold all but three of the government posts, which would go to the Nazis; one of these would be Hitler as Chancellor.

On 4 January 1933, von Papen privately agreed to work with Hitler. Hitler would be Chancellor with von Papen as Vice-Chancellor. At first von Papen failed to persuade von Hindenburg to agree to the deal.

Von Hindenburg wanted von Papen to return as Chancellor. Von Papen refused, believing it might trigger a revolution against the President. He then persuaded von Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as Chancellor because:

- refusal might lead to civil war
- there would be only a few Nazis in the Cabinet
- von Papen would be Vice-Chancellor
- they would be able to use Hitler and then ‘get rid of him’.



In the hope of creating a stable government, the elderly President von Hindenburg agreed to the plan. So on 30 January 1933, Hitler became Chancellor of Germany.

For further information on how Hitler became Chancellor, go to the link below. There are two useful podcasts worth listening to.

<http://www.johndclare.net/Weimar7.htm>

Exam hint

Make sure you have a thorough knowledge of the chronology of the key events and personalities of 1932–3, especially von Papen, von Hindenburg and von Schleicher, in case you have to write about the part they played in bringing Hitler to power.

Self check

(Allow 15 minutes)

- 1 What were the political and economic effects of the Great Depression on Germany?
- 2 Why was Hitler invited to become Chancellor in January 1933?

You will find feedback to self checks at the end of the section.

Summary

- The Great Depression provided the opportunity for Hitler to come to power. The Depression led to unemployment in Germany reaching six million.
- Hitler was able to take advantage of the economic and political crisis to win increased support.
- Hitler won support through skilful propaganda, the activities of the SA and his personal appeal.
- The events of 1932 and January 1933, especially the frequent changes of government, brought Hitler to power.

Key terms

Article 48: section of the German Constitution which gave the President the power to rule without the Reichstag in an emergency

depression: downturn or slump in the economy which leads to unemployment

propaganda: the use of information, often biased or misleading, to promote a political cause or point of view

References

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<http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/pre1933.htm>

What next?

We hope this sample has helped you to decide whether this course is right for you.

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